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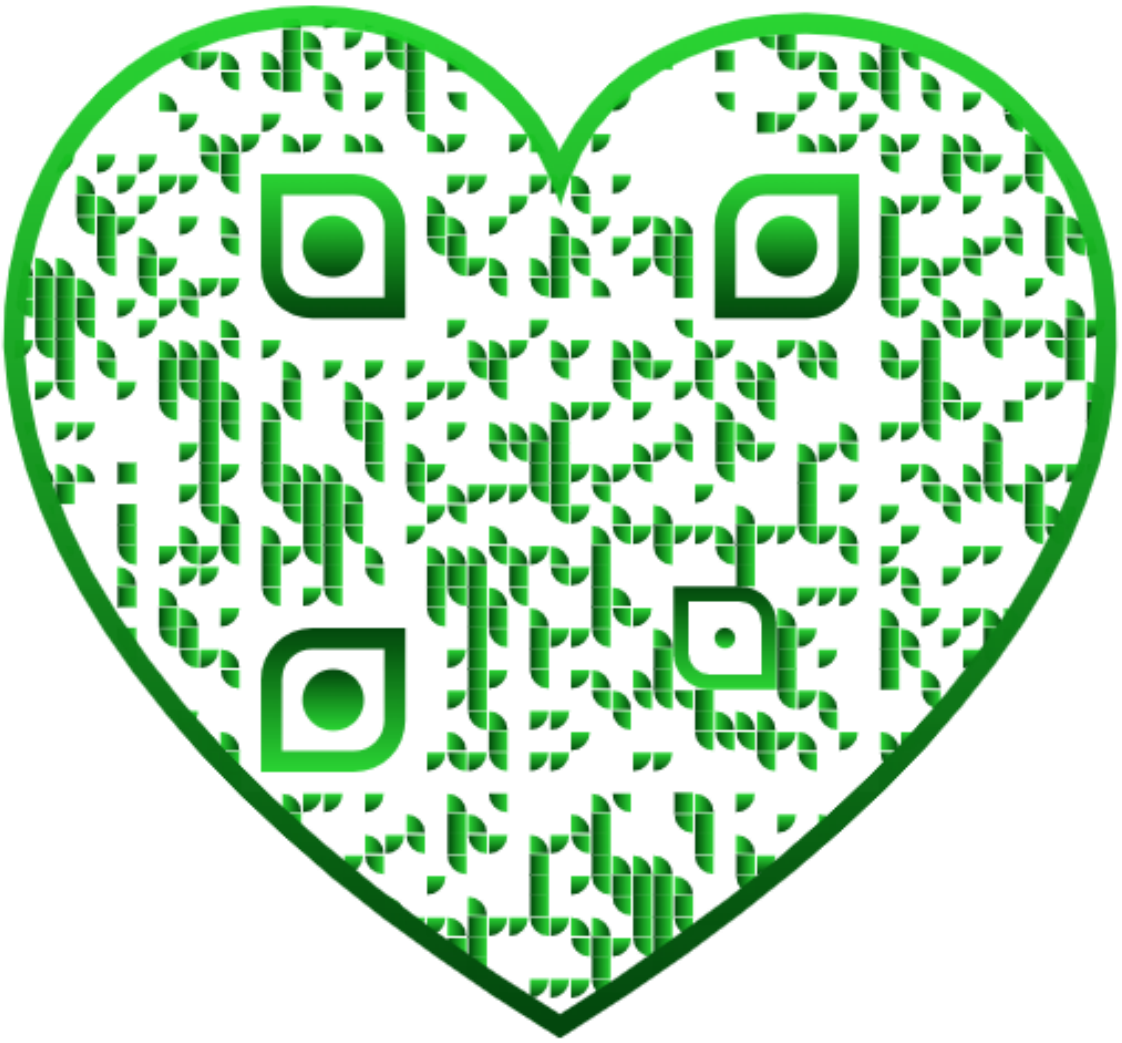

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Anthem Publishing
Suite 6 Piccadilly House, London Road,
Bath BA1 6PL
Tel **+44 (0) 1225 489 984**
Email **guitarandbass@anthem-publishing.com**

www.guitar-bass.net

Editor **Chris Vinnicombe**
chris.vinnicombe@anthem-publishing.com

Creative Director **Jenny Cook**
jenny.cook@anthem-publishing.com

Production Editor **Gary Walker**
gary.walker@anthem-publishing.com

Digital Editor **Andy Price**
andy.price@anthem-publishing.com

Digital Assistant **Tom Turner**
tom.turner@anthem-publishing.com

Contributors **Michael Heatley, Steve Bailey, Guthrie Govan, Alan Clayson, Lars Mullen, Huw Price, Marcus Leadley, Rick Batey, Richard Purvis, Gareth Morgan, Paul Day, Sid Bishop, John Pickford, Douglas Noble, Jo Johnson**

Instrument Photography **Eleanor Jane**

Publisher **Simon Lewis**
simon.lewis@anthem-publishing.com

ADVERTISING

Senior Sales Executive **Gemma Bown**
Tel **+44 (0) 7788 266847**
gemma.bown@anthem-publishing.com

Ad Production **Craig Broadbridge**
craig.broadbridge@anthem-publishing.com

ANTHEM PUBLISHING

Managing Director **Jon Bickley**
jon.bickley@anthem-publishing.com

Editorial Director **Paul Pettengale**
paul.pettengale@anthem-publishing.com

Marketing Executive **Verity Travers**
verity.travers@anthem-publishing.com

PRINT & PRODUCTION

Print **Polestar UK Print Ltd**
Tel **+44 (0) 1582 678 900**

Distributed by **Marketforce (UK) Ltd**
The Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark Street
London SE1 0SU *Tel* **+44 (0) 203 148 3000**

LICENSING

Jon Bickley *Tel* **+44 (0) 1225 489 984**
Jon.Bickley@anthem-publishing.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS & BACK ISSUES

https://anthem.subscribeonline.co.uk
Tel **0844 322 1291*** (UK)
Tel **800 428 3003** (US Toll Free)
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These boots are made for stompin'

When The Rolling Stones grabbed the zeitgeist by the scruff of the neck with a three-and-a-half-minute blast of sexual frustration and commercialism in the summer of 1965, it also announced the arrival in the mainstream pop sphere of the stompbox guitar effect. Keith's use of the Maestro FZ-1 Fuzz-Tone on *(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction* was a sensation, and all available stock of the pedal sold out by the end of the year. It wasn't long before the sounds created by guitarists experimenting with the new floor-based guitar effects units were all over the hit parade.

Fast-forward to 2015 and effects pedals are everywhere; social media platforms and web forums bristle with pictures of people's stompbox set-ups, with most modern players preferring the convenience and stability of a pedalboard rather than a chain of units spread across the stage, rehearsal room or even bedroom floor. Compact effects have been around for decades, of course, but the new breed of micro pedals makes it possible to have an even more space-efficient pedalboard set-up than ever.

While assembling your whole board using the tiniest pedals available is perfectly viable, most of us have a couple of larger, old faithful units that we consider to be indispensable, so we end up with an assortment of enclosure sizes at our feet. This month, our cover feature looks at the phenomenon of micro pedals and small pedalboards in depth – if you are tempted to downsize but don't know where to begin, read this first! The real beauty of pedals is, of course, that you don't need to spend a lot of money to make a big difference to your sound, and we can all get on board with that...

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THIS MONTH'S EXPERTS...

GUTHRIE GOVAN

As a star sideman to such disparate artists as Steven Wilson and Dizzee Rascal, Guthrie has proved that there's nothing he can't play. This month, one of the planet's most astonishing guitarists helps you become a better improvisor on page 40.

HUW PRICE

Huw spent 16 years as a pro audio engineer, working with the likes of David Bowie, Primal Scream and NIck Cave. His book *Recording Guitar & Bass* was published in 2002, sparking a career in guitar journalism. He also builds and maintains guitars, amps and FX.

RICHARD PURVIS

A reformed drummer, Richard has been gigging for over 20 years as a guitarist and bassist, and working as a music journalist for almost as long. He also composes music for television, and is legally married to his 1966 Gibson Melody Maker.

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Join the mini-pedal army as we round up and rate compact boards, essential accessories and the best tiny stompboxes available

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Getty Images

CHRIS SQUIRE

1948-2015

We look back on the life of the trailblazing Yes bassist

Words **Michael Heatley**

In a year in which we have already lost Andy Fraser, the passing of Chris Squire on 27 June leaves another huge void in British rock and bass-playing history. Squire was a fixture in the many incarnations of Yes, until retiring from the live line-up in May to fight leukaemia – the progressive rock legends' only ever-present member in their 47 years.

Squire, born in north London in 1948, started out playing Motown covers with mid-60s band The Syn. "The fact that those songs had clever basslines probably helped me develop as a player," he told *G&B* in one of several interviews.

Squire was synonymous with the Rickenbacker 4001, acquiring the fourth to be imported into the UK after those for John Entwistle, Pete Quaife and Donovan. "After I left school, I spent a bit of time working in Boosey & Hawkes music store in Regent Street," he recalled. "They were the English agents for Rickenbacker, so I managed to blag one at employee price!"

He rewired his bass to send a split signal to bass and guitar amps – a forerunner of 'Rick-O-Sound' – and its tone was well suited to his dynamic yet melodic playing. Squire mixed and matched effects with gusto, too: "I use the usual suspects like fuzz, echo, delay, wah, flangers and choruses, in tandem to get different sounds," he told us.

Squire applied floral wallpaper to his bass during his psychedelic late-60s period; the 'de-flowered' instrument, substantially slimmer wood-wise after it was stripped and refinished in cream in the early 70s, was used as the template for a signature model, the 4001CS. The original appears on tracks such as *Roundabout* and *Yours Is No Disgrace*, and even more prominently on 1975 solo LP *Fish Out Of Water*. Fish was Squire's nickname.

The contribution Squire made to Yes's music, from 1969's eponymous debut, on which he co-wrote four tracks, to last year's *Heaven & Earth*, explored the possibilities of the bass guitar as a melodic counterpoint to the vocal line delivered, until recently, by Jon Anderson. In many ways, he used Paul McCartney, another early Rickenbacker adopter, as a launching point for his swooping, expansive runs.

> *"Squire's bass doesn't only anchor the sound, it defines it!"*
> **DVD REVIEW, 2003**

Chris was well aware of his trailblazer status, but wore it lightly: when *G&B* remarked in 2003 that the first web review of Yes's *Live In Montreux* DVD insisted that "Squire's bass doesn't only anchor the sound, it defines it!" he remarked: "That's very nice – I shall have to send him a Christmas card!" A 2012 collaboration with fellow prog legend Steve Hackett (ex-Genesis), as Squackett, was also well-received by critics.

Squire briefly re-formed The Syn in 2005 after the death in 2003 of keyboard player Andrew Jackman, and his body of work will surely remain a primer for rock bass players for decades to come.

This month's happenings...

SIX (STRINGS) ON THE BEACH

Do you want to be a record breaker?

Thousands of guitarists from all over the globe will gather on Lyme Regis beach in September, aiming to set a new world record.

Having achieved the British record for the biggest band last year, when Deep Purple's Ian Gillan led 3,500 players through *Smoke On The Water*, this time round Guitars On The Beach, at the Food Rocks Festival in Dorset, is aiming to go one better.

Organiser Bernie Fallon said: "It's an amazing atmosphere, a real family event with competitions and prizes. Anyone with a guitar can register and arrive on the beach and take part in 'The Sand Band'... it's free to play."

Blackstar Amplification is providing the backline for the attempt, which takes place on Saturday, 5 September. For more information, go to the website at www.guitarsonthebeach.com.

WIN! A FULLY-LOADED DIAGO PEDALBOARD WORTH £282!

Enter our competition for a chance to win a Diago Sprinter loaded with Xvive pedals and a PSU

This month, we rate the best compact pedalboards on the market and show you how to build your own, but if that's still not enough, how about the chance to win one? Courtesy of John Hornby Skewes, one lucky reader will win a Diago Sprinter pedalboard (see our review on page 23) complete with Xvive Maxverb digital reverb, Delay, Chorus Vibrato and Classic Rock overdrive pedals and a Diago Micropower9 PSU.

To be in with a chance of winning this excellent prize, simply email guitarandbass@anthem-publishing.com with 'PEDALBOARD' in the subject line and your answer to the following question:

Q What fuzz pedal did Keith Richards use on *(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction*?

A Electro-Harmonix Big Muff
B Z.Vex Fuzz Factory
C Maestro FZ-1 Fuzz-Tone

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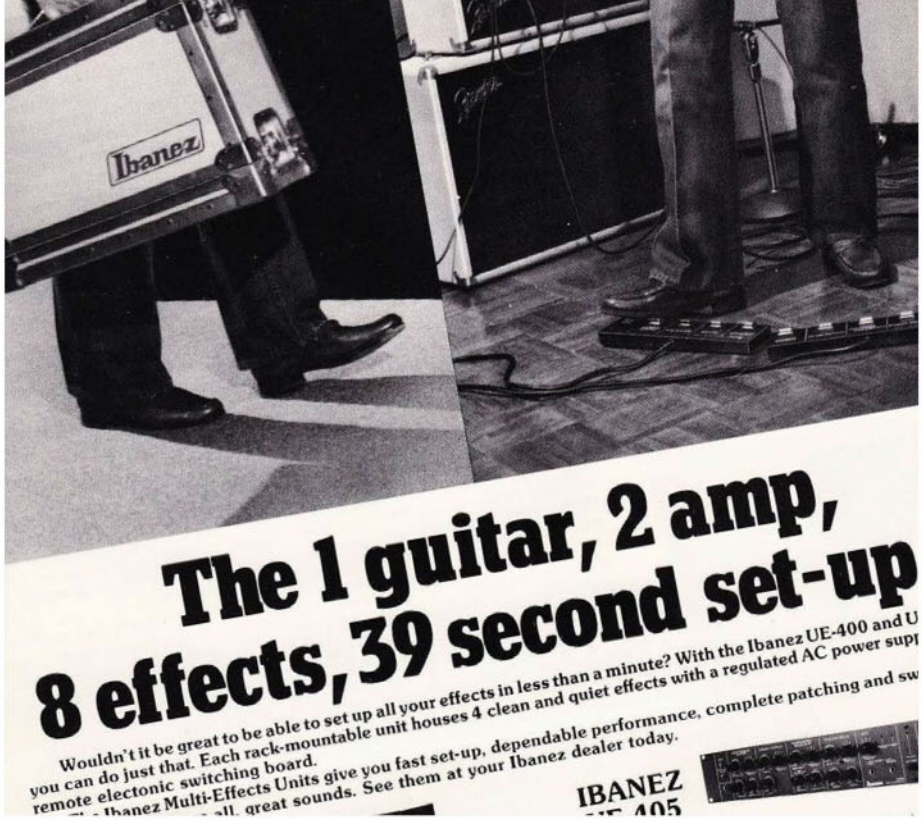
MICRO MACHINES

Whether it's the digitised version of your record collection that you carry around in your pocket or the lunchbox amp head that you plug into at rehearsals, miniaturisation is all around us. Accordingly, guitar gear is more space-efficient than ever, and there's never been as much choice when it comes to painting a rainbow of effects pedals at your feet. Across the following pages, we'll explain how downsizing your pedalboard can supersize your tone, and guide you through the pitfalls of assembling a killer compact setup...

Words **Chris Vinnicombe** | Photography **Eleanor Jane**



POWER TO THE PEDALS

THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO POWER UP A SMALL BOARD...

For tonal purists, there's no substitute for a properly-regulated power supply with isolated outputs. The T-Rex Fuel Tank Junior (£89) is perfect for most mini-boards of five pedals or less, provides five isolated 9V outputs delivering 120mA each and is powered by a robust IEC cable. Also check out the Voodoo Lab Pedal Power ISO-5 (£115) – some pedals, such as the Fulltone OCD, will love the dedicated 18V output. If you want to go down the rechargeable route, the best small-board solution in our experience is the Pedaltrain Volto (£79). Its lithium-ion battery has a 2000mA total output capacity and the sleek unit is designed to fit between the rails of Pedaltrain boards. A mini-USB input allows it to be charged anywhere in the world, and we've often found pedals that are susceptible to noise when plugged into the mains are better behaved when using the Volto. The supplied cables allow you to power six pedals from two outputs. The Visual Sound 1 Spot (£19.99) and Diago Micropower9 (£32.99) offer simple power solutions for small boards, while if you already own a tuner such as the Boss TU-2 or the TC Electronic PolyTune Classic you can use a suitable daisy chain cable to power your other pedals. It's not the cleanest solution, sonically speaking, but it works.

"I have a philosophy: more is more, less is less. The idea that less is more is illogical." This quote, attributed to none other than Yngwie J Malmsteen, might read like something forged in the brain of Nigel Tufnel, but it actually goes a long way towards distilling the collective mindset of whole generations of rock guitarists. Walls of Marshall cabinets, enormous lighting rigs, even bigger hair; so much of rock guitar iconography is bound up in our desire to make the biggest possible statement.

We want a big sound, we want to cut through the mix, we are constantly perplexed by the existence of 'low' inputs on amplifiers; after all, what strutting peacock in their right mind would ever consider subjecting an instrument to the indignity of plugging it into anything other than the socket marked 'high'? And when the show's over, the waiting limousine will transport us to our private jet stocked with an endless supply of Jack Daniel's and adoring groupies. Repeat to fade, or more likely, burn out.

Of course, it's not the 1970s anymore. Even then, this wanton rock 'n' roll fantasy was enacted only by the upper echelons of rock royalty. Today, the reality for most of us is a hatchback rather than a stretch limo, with extra-curricular frivolities limited to no more than a couple of shandies because we're driving home after the show. As a result, plenty of gigging electric guitarists have reached the same, pragmatic conclusion: in most scenarios, a 1x12 valve combo of 20-30 watts with an efficient speaker is a much more appropriate and practical choice than a stack. And it'll sit much more comfortably on the passenger seat in that hatchback.

When it comes to effects, the story is similar, but not as simple. Compact effects pedals are nothing new; by the late 1970s, MXR, Ibanez and Boss were all manufacturing circuits in die-cast enclosures with identical proportions to those you'll find in the same brands' catalogues today. Yet, having ridden the waves of rack unit obsession in the 80s, the rise of digital multi-effects units in the 90s and the speedy advance of modelling units in the following decade, the compact, single-function pedal is still king. More players than not still prefer the sound of a standalone stompbox to the comparable voice on a multi-effects unit, and adding a new pedal remains the most affordable way to make a dramatic and inspiring difference to your setup.

In recent years, the number of small, boutique pedal companies has mushroomed, particularly in North America where the relationship between pedal builders and online forums seems symbiotic – although there's no shortage of interesting pedals emerging from the UK. Musicians on web communities and social media appear to like

OUT OF SPACE? *Don't panic, it's possible to claw some back...*

Using patch cables with 'pancake' connectors (1), rather than chunky right-angle jacks such as these Neutriks (2), to connect pedals with side-mounted jack sockets can save up to 20mm per connection point. You've only got to do that three times to have room for another MXR-sized pedal on your board. Top-mounted connections (3) allow for maximum space-efficiency, just choose your connectors carefully; they might not leave much room to work with, especially if the power connection is top-mounted.

nothing better than looking at pictures and video footage of other people's equipment and posting their own in return, which has helped increase both the visibility and momentum of the guitar effects industry globally. Against this backdrop, tiny pedals and compact pedalboards have carved a significant niche. And with the arrival of the Ibanez TS Mini Tube Screamer and Dunlop Cry Baby Mini Wah at Winter NAMM earlier this year, now that the most iconic effects pedals of all time are available with drastically reduced footprints, we can officially claim 2015 as the year that mini effects went overground.

> Now the most iconic pedals are available with reduced footprints, we can claim 2015 as the year mini effects went overground

Little wonders

So, what's the appeal? For some players, smaller enclosures simply offer a means of cramming yet more pedals onto every spare inch of an already-overloaded, do-it-all board. For others, the idea of a compact pedalboard consisting of just four or five pedals has considerable charm. And the smaller the pedals, the more compact that board can be. For the majority of gigging acoustic players or bassists, a handful of effects is usually all that's required. People will talk about their 'grab and go board' or their 'fly rig' and, like our small valve combo on the passenger seat, convenience and portability are key factors.

Cynics among you might argue that the proportion of people showing off their fly rigs on the internet who use aircraft as a regular means of transport to and from gigs is roughly equivalent to the percentage of Ramones t-shirt owners who have listened to any of the band's albums in their entirety. That's hardly the point; it's not just convenient to own a small pedalboard, the whole process of putting one together is a lot of fun. Whether you are an in-demand, jet-setting session player or someone who occasionally jams with friends, imposing limitations on the physical size of your rig also makes you ask hard questions about what you really need to get through a performance. What's the one effect that defines your sound? What's nice to have, but non-essential?

To use a modern recording studio analogy, it's all very well having hundreds of amazing-sounding plugins at your fingertips, but if you are going to sit there all day auditioning them without ever producing an end product, it's utterly counter-productive. Commit to a sound, get your parts down and don't try to fix it in the mix. Similarly, when it comes to pedals, a small board that delivers a handful of core sounds that you enjoy working with will prevent you from spending too much time tweaking, remove the distraction of dozens of blinking lights at your feet and help you become immersed in the music you are creating. Lest we forget, without music, effects pedals are nothing more than expensive paperweights.

Toe tapping

Many of the new breed of small pedals sound great, but you have to consider their physical limitations. It's tempting to squeeze as many units onto your board as you can, but remember that the smaller the target, the greater the margin for error. You don't want to accidentally engage your fuzz pedal during a sensitive ballad just because you've positioned it so close to your chorus that only George Best in his pomp would have had the sufficiently deft footwork required to avoid stepping on both switches at the same time.

Similarly, if you are using a mini looper – and we'd heartily recommend finding the room for one, as they are incredibly creative tools for composition and performance – you need to be able to tread on it with confidence, as squarely on the beat as possible. Avoid positioning any pedals you'll be triggering mid-song in a way that leaves any of their mass hanging over the edge of the board. It's inviting problems, as narrow enclosures are hard to fasten securely and are more likely to flip over than chunkier units, given their lower contact surface to weight ratio.

On a small pedalboard, you shouldn't encounter too many issues with undesirable high-end roll-off, unless you are using only true-bypass pedals and very long instrument cables at either end. That said, it's still worth considering either a dedicated buffer or incorporating a pedal with a good buffered bypass into your setup. Generally speaking, the fewer devices that you place between your instrument and amplifier, the better you'll sound. By 'better', we mean that the natural voice of your guitar and amp will be allowed to sing without being constricted or dulled. Every patch cable that you add to your signal >

TIE THE MOTHERS DOWN

VELCRO, ZIP TIES AND OTHER SOLUTIONS

When it comes to attaching pedals to a board, the majority of players opt for velcro. It's cheap and readily available, and if your board surface is good you should have few problems. If you do have problems, seek out 3M Dual Lock. It's the toughest hook and loop material in the playground, and could probably keep a wing on a Boeing at cruising altitude. We're not fans of using zip ties to keep pedals in place, as it's ugly and involves using non-slip pads to stop them moving around, but if you are using zip ties to keep your wiring from turning into something resembling linguine, self-adhesive cable tie mounts are your friends; you can get them for pennies online, and they do a great job of keeping the underside of a Pedaltrain tidy. Reusable velcro cable ties are dirt cheap but extremely handy, too. And if you want your pedals to be immovable, there's always the bike chain link method. Look it up on Google, but not if you plan on changing the configuration of your pedals with any kind of frequency...

chain introduces additional capacitance, which can attenuate high end. Throw away those cheap, moulded patch leads and invest in some decent ones. If you have settled on your ideal pedal arrangement, you might consider a solderless kit that allows you to trim the lengths of cable to the size required, whereas those of us who like to rotate pedals or play in a couple of bands might be better off with cables that allow for greater flexibility.

Plan B

A stripped-down rig makes trouble-shooting easier. While we all love to admire elaborate pedalboards with dozens of stompboxes wired neatly into various loops via programmable switching systems, what if something goes wrong? No matter how tidy the underside of your board appears, navigating your way through a network of power leads and patch cables under stage lights, in front of a paying audience, is never going to be fun. Isolating the problem is going to be simpler if your board has just a handful of pedals on it.

Unless you are lucky enough to have a guitar tech whose job it is to take care of those problems for you, we'd recommend that you have a backup plan for equipment failure at gigs. For your pedalboard, this could be as simple as keeping emergency patch cables and a spare PSU to hand. You might even consider a 'get out of jail' stompbox with a fresh battery in it (realistically, for 90 per cent of players this is an overdrive) that sits on top of your amp – perhaps even on a tiny board of its own! – allowing you to quickly plug into it and bypass your pedalboard if something in your effects chain goes down.

Sadly, most audience members are unlikely to notice the difference between the subtle tonal flavours on your carefully-chosen compact pedalboard, but they will lose interest and go to the bar if you spend a few minutes on your hands and knees frantically re-routing patch leads. Effective and memorable live shows are as much about momentum and pacing as songs and musicianship; plan for when your board goes down (because one day it will) and know how to implement that plan as seamlessly as possible.

Decisions, decisions

Perhaps you've decided to put together a small pedalboard in pursuit of tonal purity. Maybe you fancy assembling different boards for your originals band and your covers band, or perhaps you prefer the idea of two compact boards arranged in a V-shape. Whatever your motivation, it's time to take a look at the options when it comes to choosing the board itself. Even as recently as the late 1990s, there really wasn't a great deal available, but happily, there are numerous off-the-shelf and custom designs on the market these days with an array of innovative features. Let's take a look at seven of the contenders for your cash... >

LAYING CABLE

BECAUSE ALL PATCH CABLES ARE NOT CREATED EQUAL

Thankfully, there's not quite as much snake oil in the world of guitar cables as there is in the high-end hi-fi market, but there is more than a little mystique nonetheless, and it remains a hugely subjective area. Generally speaking, we'd recommend avoiding the multi-packs of moulded plastic cables that come in a variety of colours; even with a small pedalboard, spending a little bit more cash in this area will pay tonal dividends. We've seen six-inch **Hosa** patch cables with pancake connectors for as little as £4.39 each on eBay; they're incredibly space-efficient and generally well-behaved. If money is no object and you need more positional flexibility, **Lava**'s **Mini Coils** (www.lavacable.com) look and sound fantastic. Those of you who chop and change your pedal configuration regularly might find that the six-to-12-inch stretch and overall quality justifies the £19 price tag. Yes, that's £19 each. Just be careful that nobody pinches your cables and leaves the pedals behind... If you are reasonably settled on your setup, then various companies make excellent solderless cable kits that can be cut to custom sizes. There's Lava again, and also **Evidence Audio** (www.evidenceaudio.com), **Planet Waves** (www.planetwaves.com) and, of course, **George L's** (www.georgelsstore.com). If you use lots of the same brand of pedal, you might also consider straight or Z-shaped jack-to-jack connectors by the likes of **Mooer** (www.mooeraudio.co.uk) and **Rotosound** (www.rotosound.com).

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Pedaltrain Nano+

The market leader updates its smallest and lightest design

PRICE £42 **CONTACT** www.westsidedistribution.com

Guitar Bass AWARD EXCELLENCE 10/10

Since the company began as a one-man start-up in 1999, Pedaltrain has become so ubiquitous with the pedalboard market that some stompbox manufacturers now factor the dimensions of Pedaltrain boards into their plans when they're designing new products.

As successful as Pedaltrain is, though, it refuses to rest on its laurels. Back in January 2015, the NAMM Show saw the company discontinue its entire range and launch 11 new models, from the enormous 42x14.5-inch Terra right down to the smallest board in its range, the Nano+.

Manufactured from airline-grade lightweight aluminium, as is the rest of the new range, the Nano+ benefits from having a new, narrower rail spacing system that's designed to provide greater stability and adhesion for smaller pedals.

You also get an additional four inches of width to play with, compared to the previous Pedaltrain Nano, making it feasible to fit up to six standard compact effects on the board – even more if you use mini-pedals. Another notable improvement for 2015 comes in the quality of the supplied soft case; it's much more road-worthy than the previous iteration, with chunky metal zippers and strap clasps, tough padding and reinforced stress points.

The Pedaltrain sets the mini pedalboard bar pretty high

The beauty of the Nano+ lies in its simplicity. Once you've added the supplied velcro to the board, it takes hardly any time at all to position your pedals and use a combination of the slatted design and the supplied bundle of zip ties to keep the wiring tidy. Add a small tin for pick storage and you're good to go.

Pedaltrain's own rechargeable Volto power supply is still the neatest solution for the Nano+, and it's possible to position it in such a way that the power switch is accessible and the battery life indicator lights are visible through the rails. If you want to use a PSU that's physically larger than the space beneath the Nano+ will allow, online research reveals numerous Pedaltrain modifications that people have made, from raising the height by using larger rubber feet to getting creative with a Dremel. It's all part of the fun...

Guitar Bass VERDICT

+ Superb value for money
+ Outperforms similarly-priced competition
+ Previous Nano users will really feel the benefit of the extra space

– We wish the gigbag had a pocket to store cables and strings

The industry standard just got better, with greater capacity and a tougher gigbag. At this price, it's impossible not to recommend

10/10

JOIN THE REVOLUTION

ARTIST: JOE ROBINSON

JOIN THE LOOPSTATION REVOLUTION WITH THE NEW RC-1 FROM BOSS, WITH UP TO 12 MINUTES OF STEREO RECORDING TIME, AND A SUPER-BRIGHT 24-SEGMENT LOOP INDICATOR THAT SHOWS WHETHER YOU'RE RECORDING, OVERDUBBING OR JUST PLAYING. PLUG IN, PLAY AND BLOW THEM AWAY; AGAIN AND AGAIN.

BOSS

Temple Audio Design Solo 18

Innovative Canadian design dispenses with the need for hooks and loops

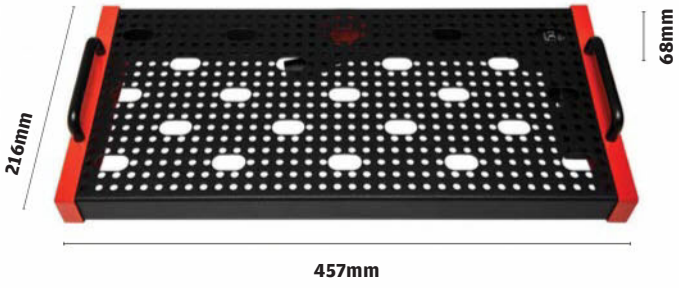
PRICE £69.50 **CONTACT** www.templeboards.co.uk

It's rare that a pedalboard manufacturer attempts to challenge the supremacy of velcro. It's imperfect, but it remains the fastening system of choice for the majority. Instead, Canadian company Temple Audio Design utilises a proprietary Quick Release Pedal Mounting System, which incorporates metal plates that adhere to the back of your pedals and lock into the perforations on the pedalboard surface, fastening on the underside with a thumbscrew.

Mounting plates are available in three sizes to suit various types of stompbox, and are priced at £2.50, £3 and £3.50 for small, medium and large respectively. The plates themselves are reusable, but you'll need to purchase replacement adhesive pads for each additional use, priced at £1.30, £1.80 and £2.60.

The Solo 18, which has the largest surface area of the boards on test, is wedge-shaped and available with a choice of three accent colours: Temple Red (as reviewed), Vintage White or Gunmetal grey. The perforated metal surface also features what Temple calls 'cable management holes', which should give you the flexiblity to position your stompboxes as required, especially if you are using custom-length patch cables. We weren't, hence the slightly off-kilter alignment of the Fuzz Face Mini in the picture above. One of the neat features particular to the Temple design is that the end sections of each board feature pre-machined module slots that allow the discreet integration of optional extras, such as the company's IEC mains connector with power on/off switch (£39.95) and four-way jack patch connector (£33.95). It's a great idea, but the screws that hold these modules in place are rather small, and ours worked itself loose with repeated plugging and unplugging of cables, so we'd recommend using some form of thread-locking fluid before taking a module-loaded board out on the road.

Once everything's secured firmly in place, the Temple system works well; we just wonder if it's a lot of hassle for those players who regularly swap pedals in and out of their rigs. The optional soft case is well-padded, with a sizeable external pocket, but be aware that by the time you factor in its additional cost (£39.95), plus the two modules and five or six mounting plates, you'll be looking at an outlay of nearly £200 for the whole set-up.



The Solo 18's mounting plates come in three sizes

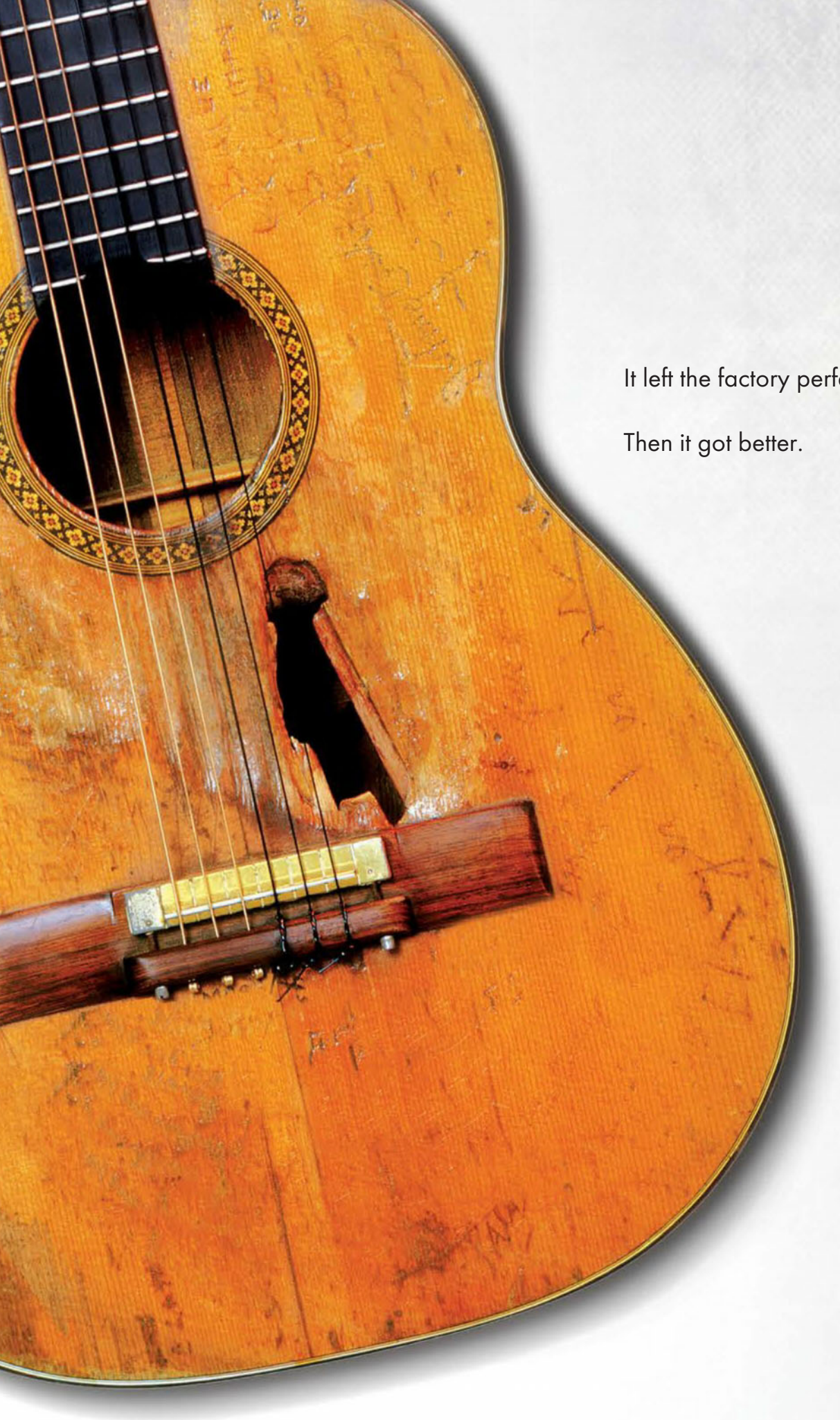
The plates are fastened to the board by thumbscrews

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Thoughtful approach to the needs of players, including carry handles!
+ Light weight and smart looks
– Requires significant financial and practical investment
– Module screws could be more road-worthy

With a few tweaks, the Temple system could be a winner, but some players may be put off by the level of fuss

7/10



It left the factory perfect 46 years ago.

Then it got better.

Martin & Co. EST. 1833

D35 TURNS 50

Willie Nelson's beloved Martin N-20. To find a guitar you'll love to pieces visit a Martin Dealer.
To find an authorised UK Martin Dealer visit www.quickfind.me/martin

West Coast Pedalboard Little Rock

High-quality, bespoke board that can be tailored to your every need

PRICE $129.99 **CONTACT** www.westcoastpedalboard.com

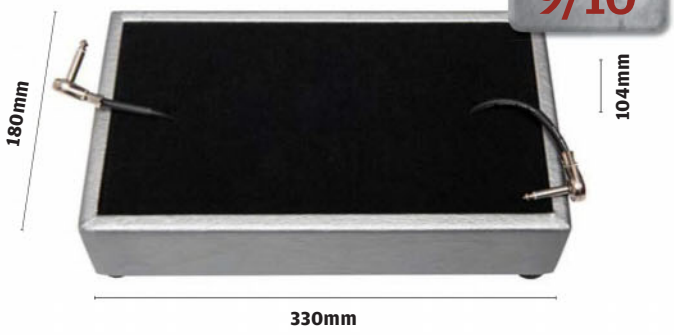
Guitar & Bass AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Based in Sonoma County, California, West Coast Pedalboard has been hand-building a variety of designs using as many US-sourced parts as possible since early 2012. The 13x7-inch Little Rock is from the company's Standard line, but the Custom Shop offers a vast array of options, from exotic woods to personalised logos. Standard it may be, but the Little Rock feels very much like a boutique product, especially finished in this smart, limited edition silver tolex.

The Little Rock base price is $79.99, but for an extra $49.99 you can add the electronics package seen here; two high-quality Mogami cables with Switchcraft pancake plugs are wired to side-mounted 1/4-inch jack sockets housed in Electrosocket satin chrome mounts. The cables are routed up through two holes in the board surface, which is also how your power cables make their way to the pedals when a PSU is mounted underneath. Power supply mounting brackets that are compatible with various Voodoo Labs, T-Rex and other companies' units cost an extra $10.

We used a Pedaltrain Volto for the purposes of testing, but once your power supply is securely in place, there's a circular port for mains cable access, should you need it.

The optional electronics package adds integrated jack connections



When arranging our pedals on the board, we did find the position of the cable holes slightly awkward, but happily the Little Rock now comes with a longer, more practical cable access slot as standard.

Made from Baltic birch ply, the Little Rock features a 25mm thick frame with a 10mm board surface, supported by a couple of internal metal brackets; it's chunky and confidence-inspiring, and with amp-style rubber feet it isn't going to slide around onstage. The Super Loop surface is also the best on test by some distance – with ordinary velcro hook tape on our pedals, once situated, adjusting their position involved the use of a butter knife to prise them away from the surface, as they refused to come off with hand power alone. Though it's far from the cheapest option available here in the UK, and you'll need to fork out another $120 for a bespoke gigbag, the Little Rock feels like a high-quality, long-term investment.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Looks great and is built to last
+ Numerous options including various tolex colours and lacquered tweed
– 104mm-high wedge not for everyone, but flat version available
– UK buyers will have to stump up for shipping and import duty

The Little Rock will still be rocking long after many of the competition have bitten the dust

9/10

Diago Sprinter

Ultra-portable, lightweight mini-board with soft case

PRICE £39.99 **CONTACT** www.jhs.co.uk

Pedalboards don't come much simpler than the Sprinter. Though Diago also manufactures hardcase boards that measure more than a metre in width, the diminutive Sprinter comes in a nylon gigbag and is designed to hold four standard compact stompboxes, six mini ones or a combination of both types. The board itself is high-density fibreboard with loop carpet on one side and six, non-slip rubber feet on the other. On a varnished wooden floor, the Sprinter proves less mobile when unloaded than the fully-loaded Mooer M6. So far, so good, then.

The setup that we assembled for testing purposes utilised a daisy chain out of the Boss TU-2 to power the other stompboxes, with an off-board adaptor powering the TU-2. On a flat pedalboard design such as this, where there's nowhere to hide cabling, you will inevitably get the spaghetti effect, but this is easy enough to keep under control using velcro cable ties. One of the deeper boards on test, the Sprinter coped with the Morley M2 Mini Volume with minimal overhang. Some players might prefer a wedge shape to a flat board, but ultimately it comes down to personal preference.

Six non-slip rubber feet prevent the Sprinter from sliding

The supplied bag is reasonably well padded; it's not the most robust design of all those on test here, with plastic rather than metal shoulder strap clasps, though there is an internal pocket to house cables, batteries, strings and other ephemera, which will come in handy when gigging.

Whether you are looking for a compact alternative to your main board or a gateway into the world of pedalboard obsession, the Sprinter represents a straightforward and effective choice.

Guitar & Bass WIN THIS BOARD & PEDALS!

Want to win this board loaded with Xvive pedals and a Diago power supply? Find out how to enter our competition on **page 9**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ About the simplest design out there
+ Handles deeper pedals well

– Flat design means there's nowhere to hide cables
– Looks a little rudimentary next to some of the competition

If you want nothing more complex than a non-slip board to attach your pedals to and a decent gigbag to transport it, the Sprinter delivers

7/10

Mooer Firefly M6

Mini-flightcase board designed to hold a sextet of Mooer stompboxes

PRICE £39.99 **CONTACT** www.mooeraudio.co.uk

At last count, Mooer manufactures more than 50 mini stompboxes. The Firefly M6 is a lightweight pedalboard designed to hold up to six of them, with a detachable lid for performance use. Unscrewing the six crosshead screws that secure the board surface to the bottom half of the mini flightcase reveals that the pedals sit on a 4mm thick section of acrylic that's resting on a pair of rubberised foam compression pads. The daisy chain power lead lives in the void behind the rear compression pad, with only the connector ends visible above the surface, where two sections of pre-cut foam hold the pedals in place without the need for velcro. Though the cut-outs are designed to hold only Mooer pedals, it wouldn't be beyond the DIY skills of many of us to take a craft knife and widen the outlines to facilitate the use of pedals made by other brands.

The combination of the hidden daisy chain and Mooer's Z pedal connectors (£5.95 each) is extremely neat and, though it's not the most robust case in the world – the panels are metallic-painted hardboard, the frame is aluminium and the fittings are a little flimsy – as a compact, fuss-free setup for jam sessions, rehearsals and pub gigs, we really like this. That said, the case hasn't been designed to carry the required external mains adaptor, so you'll have to remember to pack that in your gigbag.

While the M6 is built for Mooer pedals, it's possible to re-shape the cut-outs

With the lid detached and your pedals powered up, the fully-loaded board is a little prone to skidding around; the feet on the underside of the board section could do with being more rubbery.

The Mooer pedals themselves generally perform well; many of the company's designs are, shall we say, 'inspired by' familiar circuits, and in numerous instances the choice of colour and typeface tell you exactly what to expect. If you are starting your pedalboard from scratch, by the time you factor in the purchase of six pedals, five Z connectors and an external power adaptor, the Firefly will be starting to look like less of a bargain; but if you already have a bunch of Mooer pedals, then this is a sensible choice.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Very neat and tidy solution
+ No need for velcro or zip ties
– Can be used with Mooer pedals only, unless modified
– Mains adaptor not supplied and doesn't fit in the case

It might not stand up to heavy road use, but for rehearsals, jam nights and pub gigs, this is a neat solution

7/10

Yerasov SCS 8-way

Russian technology and a Secret Connection System? Sounds like FX espionage...

PRICE £74 **CONTACT** www.yerasov.co.uk

Yerasov does things a little differently from other manufacturers, and this SCS board – short for Secret Connection System – employs a PCB and RJ connectors inside, which distribute both audio and power. Each individual pedal is also secured in place by a thumbscrew; when the whole thing is hooked up, you simply plug a standard 9V 500mA power supply into any one of the stompboxes and all eight will be powered up.

Stripped of pedals, thanks to the RJ connectors, the SCS board resembles a piece of equipment from a telephone call-centre more closely than it does a piece of guitar gear, but when everything has been assembled it's both sturdy underfoot and straightforward to use. Yerasov also makes six-way (£65) and four-way (£54) versions if you don't require as many individual sounds from your board.

No, this is not a picture of the back of our office modem, it's Yerasov's SCS

The pedals themselves will all function conventionally as part of a more traditional setup, but when used in conjunction with the SCS Footswitch here (also listed as the FS12 Loop Selector), it gives you a master on/off switch that enables you to trigger any number of the effects at once. The SCS Footswitch also doubles as a headphone amp or direct out with switchable 1x12 or 2x12 cabinet emulation and a choice of EQ curves based on Jensen (clean) and Eminence (lead) drivers.

Plugged into a decent valve combo, the Screamer and Compressor pedals sound particularly good in combination; given that the pedal selection here also includes a pair of distortions and a chorus, it's difficult to resist getting sucked into some sort of 1980s hair metal timewarp, but that's not mandatory.

It is worth noting, however, that assembling this set-up, as reviewed, would cost well in excess of £700. While over time, many players' total spend on a fully-featured pedalboard stocked with quality stompboxes might amount to more than that, you'd have to really buy into the SCS philosophy to make such a significant investment.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Innovative approach that minimises cabling
+ The ability to engage multiple effects simultaneously is very useful
– Carry bag offers no padding
– When you factor in the cost of the individual pedals, it quickly becomes an expensive option

It's niche, for sure, but Yerasov is at least bringing something different to a cluttered market

7/10

Hotone Skyboard Junior

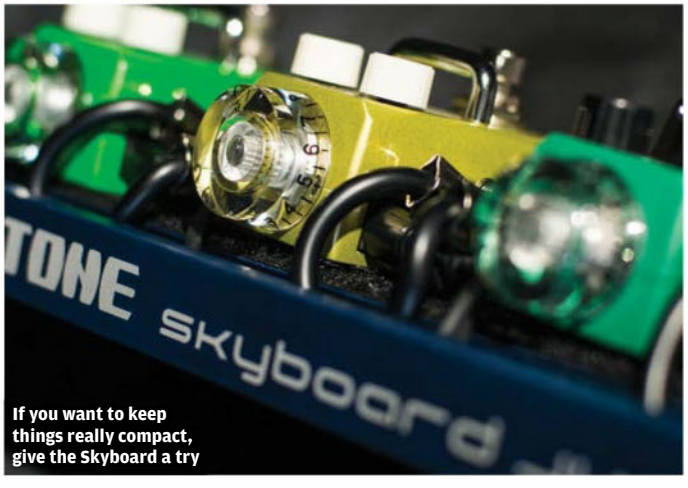
Is the tiniest pedalboard on test useful in grown-up scenarios?

PRICE £39.99 **CONTACT** www.musicpsych.com

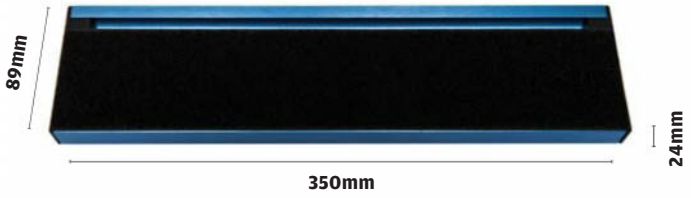
The smallest board of our magnificent seven, the Hotone Skyboard Junior can accommodate about six of the company's tiny Skyline series stompboxes, with power best supplied via a daisy chain connected to something such as a Visual Sound 1 Spot or similar. Perhaps surprisingly, the Skyboard Junior is a little weightier than the Pedaltrain Nano+, but even fully-loaded this miniature aluminium alloy board is unlikely to cause anyone's back trouble to flare up.

In use, the Skyboard Junior's rubber feet grip onto even shiny surfaces rather well, while the slotted design allows you to tidy away any trailing wires.

Though it's designed with Hotone Skyline pedals in mind, this small board will also accommodate Mooer and TC Electronic Mini-sized pedals with barely any overhang, so you aren't limited to a single brand. That said, the Hotone pedals that we've tested have given a good account of themselves, and we've noticed lots of people utilising them in order to squeeze one more effect onto an already heavily-loaded boutique board.



If you want to keep things really compact, give the Skyboard a try



The Hotone board also comes with one of the best carry bags of our round-up – it's easily roomy enough for plenty of accessories and gigbag essentials, it has one full-size and one small exterior pocket and is expandable, giving you a little more depth to play with if required.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Not limited to just Hotone Skyline pedals
+ Grips the floor, despite its small size
– Using Mooer/TC-size pedals limits the usefulness of the wiring channel
– Some players will find it all too cramped for stage use

They are quirky, but don't be tempted to write off Hotone products as novelties. If space is a real issue, check this out

7/10

ALSO TRY...

Stompblox (www.stompblox.com) arguably takes the Pedaltrain idea even further with a lightweight, modular frame system featuring swing-out feet, cable anchor points and more. Prices start at $59.99. The Feather Board, from Blackbird Custom Pedalboards (www.blackbirdpedalboards.com) is a one-piece, tolex-covered 18x7-inch design with a flightcase for $119. Gator's GPB-LAK (www.gatorcases.com) is yet another lightweight aluminium solution. It's difficult to source in the UK at the moment, but looks promising and comes packaged with a carry bag and a PSU mounting bracket. For a custom, flightcased mini-board with a true-bypass loop switcher(!), check out the Custom Pedal Boards Mini Board (www.custompedalboards.co.uk). If, however, following this in-depth look at seven of the best mini pedalboard options on the market you are still not convinced and fancy making your own, check out our DIY Workshop on page 50...

BEST IN CLASS

SHOPPING FOR MINI AND MICRO PEDALS? HERE'S A SELECTION OF OUR FAVOURITES...

1 TC Electronic Ditto Looper

£65 www.tcelectronic.com

Looping doesn't get much more intuitive than this. 24-bit uncompressed audio and unlimited overdubs mean you never have to stop playing along with yourself, while true-bypass and analogue dry-through mean that it won't mess up your core tone.

ALSO TRY *Hotone Skyline Series Wally Looper* **£79**

2 TC Electronic Hall Of Fame Mini Reverb

£60 www.tcelectronic.com

If you don't have onboard amp 'verb and need only one reverb sound live, this is the ideal space-saving solution. Beam different reverbs in using TC's TonePrint technology, or use the TonePrint Editor software to design your own custom sound.

ALSO TRY *Mooer Spark Reverb* **£69**

3 Mooer Mod Factory

£59 www.mooeraudio.co.uk

Packing 11 modulation effects into one tiny pedal, this is a perfect way to have all those 'once in a set' effects on tap without spending considerably more on a sophisticated multi-effects unit. It won't blow your mind, but it might save your bacon.

ALSO TRY *TC Electronic The Dreamscape* **£129**

4 Valeton Wave Shaker Vintage Tremolo

£49 www.valeton.net

With a sound based on the legendary Demeter Tremulator, itself modelled on Ry Cooder's vintage Fender Twin, the Wave Shaker is aimed at fans of the throb of old-school amp tremolo, and is highly adjustable thanks to its quartet of controls.

ALSO TRY *Mooer Trelicopter* **£49**

5 TC Electronic Flashback Mini

£79 www.tcelectronic.com

There are several TC pedals in this list for good reason. Factor in the flexibility of the TonePrint system and the sheer choice of delay sounds it gives you and this small box has big appeal.

ALSO TRY *Hotone Tape Eko* **£59**

6 Xotic EP Booster

£115 www.xotic.us

Based on the preamp circuit in the EP-3 Echoplex used by the likes of Jimmy Page and Eddie Van Halen, the EP Booster provides up to 20dB of sweet, beautifully-tuned boost, and is on more pro-level pedalboards than you can shake a stick at.

ALSO TRY *TC Electronic Spark Mini Booster* **£60**

7 Xotic SP Compressor

£129 www.xotic.us

Using the same OTA (operational transconductance amplifier) technology as the legendary Ross compressor, the SP features a hugely useful dry blend control, plus up to 15dB of boost and an internal DIP switch to control the attack.

ALSO TRY *Joyo Ironman Series Pipebomb Compressor* **£49**

8 TC Electronic PolyTune 2 Mini

£60 www.tcelectronic.com

Everybody needs a tuner, but nobody wants to devote too much precious pedalboard real estate to something so unglamorous. That said, with sleek design and polyphonic functionality, TC has almost managed to make the humble pedal tuner sexy. Almost...

ALSO TRY *Mooer Baby Tuner* **£49**

9 Dunlop Cry Baby Mini

£89 www.westsidedistribution.com

With a full sweep range, a Fasel inductor and three voicings, the Cry Baby Mini is even more versatile than some of its bigger siblings and, thanks to true-bypass switching, it plays nice with other pedals, too.

ALSO TRY *AMT WH-1 Japanese Girl Wah* **£75**

10 Ibanez TS Mini Tube Screamer

£65 www.headstockdistribution.com

The most imitated and cloned stompbox of all time finally became available in mini form this year, and it sounds pretty damn close to a TS808, too. Buy one, use it as a boost or full-on overdrive and find out what all the fuss is about.

ALSO TRY *Keeley Red Dirt Overdrive Mini* **£109**

READER BOARDS

Fittingly, in light of this month's mini pedalboard cover feature, **STAN COCKERAM** has built a compact board stacked with diminutive yet discerning pedals. We take a look...

KIT LIST

Stan Cockeram

- **PEDALS (IN ORDER)** Smeg Head (Clark Gainster/Hoochee Mama clone), Zendrive clone, Mooer Cruncher, Mooer Trelicopter, Mooer Reecho, Lovepedal Pickle Vibe, Klon clone
- **PATCH CABLES** George Ls
- **POWER SUPPLY** T-Rex Fuel Tank Junior, with one output split three ways by a TheGigRig Distributor
- **BOARD TYPE** Tweed case, bought from eBay

HEAR IT HERE...

Riversidebluesband.co.uk

What inspired this setup?

"I used to use more conventional pedals on a larger board, but it becomes a bit of a liability at gigs with less room. When the Mooer pedals appeared, I thought I'd try them as a laugh, but this is now the only board I have."

Tell us a little about the journey...

"I've always liked pedals, and I've owned all of the pedals that these minis are based on. Ever since I first got a Klon Centaur, that has always been the most important pedal. All of the clones on this board were built by a very clever chap called Juansolo, who is well known on the DIY and modded pedal scene. The tiny Klone is amazing, it sounds more like the real thing than any other one I've ever heard, but he swears he isn't building any more, as getting it all into the 1590A enclosure is a nightmare! The other drives are just to give different flavours. A special mention should be given to the Mooer Cruncher – I use that for ZZ Top-style Marshall tones. The echo is just for rockabilly-type sounds on a couple of songs."

Is there anything else you are looking to add?

"I'd love to find a mini pedal that sounds more like the Roger Mayer Voodoo Vibe – the Pickle Vibe is OK, but I love the grind that you get from the Voodoo Vibe. Otherwise, I am pretty happy with the board as it stands, although I do have another seven mini pedals that I swap in and out occasionally!"

What guitars and amps do you use?

"Strats, Strats and Strats – all SSS. I am now using a Fender '68 Custom Deluxe Reverb amp, which I absolutely love – it replaced my Lazy J, so that must tell you something!"

What lessons have you learned along the way?

"Don't turn them all on at once! The subtleties of individual pedals will get lost in the sound at a gig – don't obsess too much, set up your sounds and use them. Don't fiddle during the gig – I find it easier to have a pedal set up for each sound. Never turn off your Klon. Velcro is no good for use with mini pedals – use bike chain links instead."

Guitar & Bass SHOW US YOUR BOARD

To be in with a chance of seeing your pedalboard in the mag, either post a picture on our Facebook page via this link **http://bit.ly/showusyourpedalboard** or email **guitarandbass@anthem-publishing.com**

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SOUNDTRACK OF MY LIFE

Darran Charles

The frontman of Welsh progressive heavy rock trio Godsticks selects the records that shaped his style

Eleanor Jane

Inventive Welsh three-piece Godsticks release their third long-player, *Emergence*, on 4 September. Produced by James 'Lerock' Loughrey, who has worked with the likes of Page & Plant, Skindred and Depeche Mode, *Emergence* sees the band focusing on the heavier side of their sound, a decision that came about as a result of audience reactions to recent support tours with Mike Keneally and The Aristocrats. *Emergence* may be less overtly 'prog' on first listen, but there's still plenty of interesting ear candy, thanks to singer-guitarist Darran Charles' blistering fretwork, backed by a rhythm section that shifts effortlessly in and out of complex meters while serving the song and avoiding complexity for its own sake. Visit www.godsticks.co.uk to find out more, but first read on as Darran reveals the influences that make him tick...

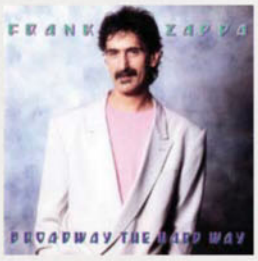
Steve Vai
FLEXABLE

"Armed with a Strat and a dry tone, this for me is Vai's best album. The solo to *Call It Sleep* is the most viscerally emotional he's ever written, and the vibrato throughout is elegant and actually sounds as if the guitar is weeping (as pretentious a description as that is!). The standout track is the wonderfully weird *Little Green Men*, with its syncopated rhythm guitar."

Bjork
VESPERTINE

"I'm a fan of her earlier albums, but it was this CD I wore out. I love the way Bjork's imperfect English adds an innocent quality to her melodies. This album is so dense and rich that each listen seems to reveal something new. Her phrasing had an impact upon my playing, as I remember closely studying her vocal style and trying to recreate it on guitar."

Frank Zappa
BROADWAY THE HARD WAY



"Full of incredible vocals and an amazing horn section, the '88 Zappa band was my favourite FZ line-up, and perhaps one of the greatest ever live bands; *Rhymin' Man* is a virtuosic band masterclass. Even though FZ is a huge influence as a composer, as a guitarist he doesn't really do it for me, but his clean solo in *Any Kind Of Pain* is one of my favourites."

Rufus Wainwright
RELEASE THE STARS

"I bought this album on the strength of hearing *Going To A Town* on the radio, but really disliked it on first listen. However, due to not having any other CDs in the car at the time, it remained in my player for a few days, and eventually his unique tone of voice and wonderful melodies began to make sense, and I fell in love with his music."

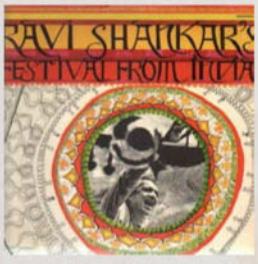
System Of A Down
MESMERIZE

"*Toxicity* reignited my interest in heavy music, which up until then had been confined to my youth. *Mesmerize* has some great riffs, but there are some interesting middle-eastern influences. The idiosyncratic vocal style in the verses contrasts with the commercial-sounding choruses, which made this album different to their ultra-manic earlier releases."

Frank Zappa
YOU ARE WHAT YOU IS

"To the uninitiated, this album was insane – the lyrics were hilarious and the compositions were equally bizarre/intriguing. Discovering Zappa was musically life-changing, and this album made me realise there are no musical rules that can't be broken. The borderline-ridiculous Ike Willis vocal break in *Beauty Knows No Pain* will live with me forever!"

Ravi Shankar
FESTIVAL FROM INDIA



"Ravi Shankar introduced me to some incredible singers and rich melodies. Harmonically simple, I was inspired to discover why the melodies moved me so much. Once I did, I found it difficult to stray from the Lydian mode! I remember using a Fostex 4-track to slow the vocal parts down to emulate vocal inflections that you don't often hear."

Mike Keneally & Beer For Dolphins
DANCING

"I stumbled upon Mike Keneally in the early noughties, even though years earlier I'd dismissed him after watching his performance in a tribute concert called 'Zappa's Universe' (where I mistook his passion for pretentiousness). I found somebody with pop sensibilities but a deep level of musicianship. Like Zappa, his music is always capable of surprising you."

Faith No More
KING FOR A DAY, FOOL FOR A LIFETIME

"Mike Patton is of the greatest singers: he can sing in any style, and this eclectic album proves it. It's the heavier tracks I like most; he is one of few singers who can sing aggressively without just shouting. There are a number of quotable and downright rude lyrics, but Patton's performance on *Gentle Art Of Making Enemies* is a vocal powerhouse."

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"When you've got thousands of people looking at you, you can't just be ordinary"

Just who in the world would be mad enough to play instrumental rock guitar music in this day and age? Joe Satriani has created a flamboyant alter ego to help him wrestle with a question that's close to his heart...

Story **Steve Bailey** | Photography **Getty Images**

The year 2014 was something of a milestone for Joe Satriani. Both his career-spanning boxset *The Complete Studio Recordings* and his autobiography *Strange Beautiful Music* were unleashed on the public, which meant he'd spent a lengthy period painstakingly examining the events and musical evolution that had brought him to this point in his existence. This work-imposed philosophical navel-gazing process would appear to have helped spawn a brand new guitar hero, albeit an imaginary one. Satriani's outrageous, Ziggy Stardust-style alter ego – Shockwave Supernova – is an anarchic character, who looks very much like Satriani and sounds very much like Satriani, but, it would appear, is willing to take ideas and concepts to an extreme that plain old Joe may have balked at.

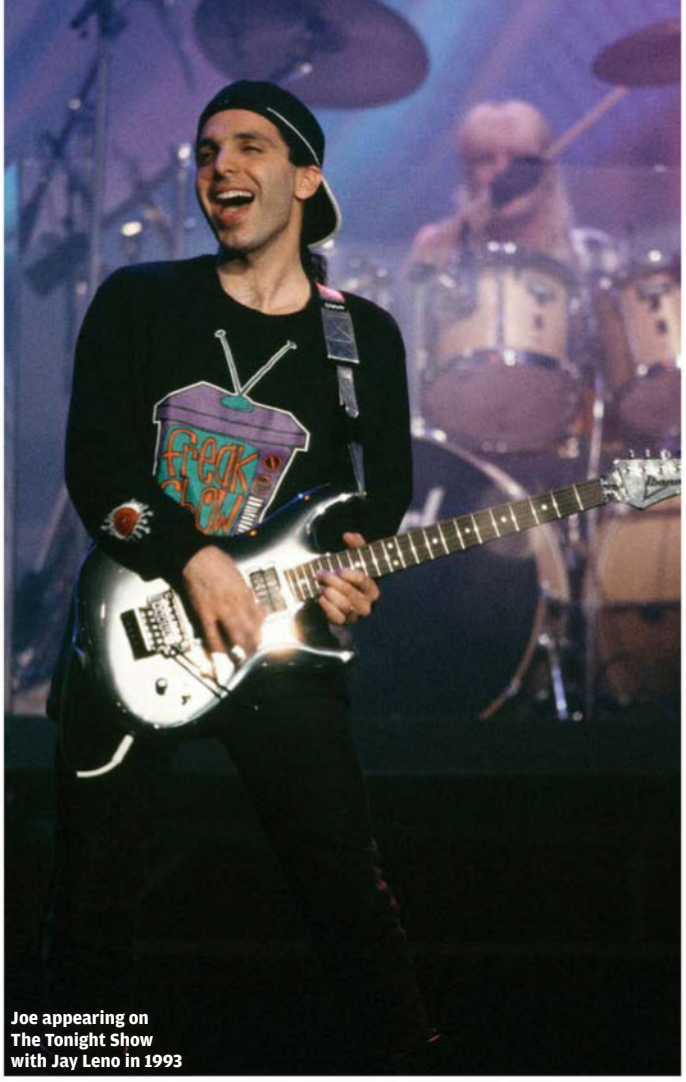
"It's very difficult to explain," he concedes. "The record was formed by this conceptual device. The music represents the memories, the aspirations, the problems, the troubles, the agony and ecstasy of this character who happens to be an instrumental rock guitarist."

It was in Singapore, playing the last show of the 2014 Unstoppable Momentum tour when Satriani became aware that his stage antics were becoming somewhat exaggerated.

"My front teeth were feeling kinda funny, and I realised that I had been playing with my teeth more than ever before," he remembers. "I kept saying to myself, walking out on stage, 'Now Joe, don't play with your teeth tonight, it's totally crass and you just shouldn't do it'. Of course, there I was playing with my teeth again and meanwhile going, 'What is it that's making me do that?'."

Satriani began to formulate a plan that he felt might release a fresh burst of creative energy. "I've never really done a concept kind of a record before," he says. "I thought, 'Who is this guy who is crazy enough >

Satriani in the 80s – a period that inspired the creation of his alter ego



Joe appearing on The Tonight Show with Jay Leno in 1993

to play instrumental rock guitar music in a world dominated by hip-hop and pop? What would he call himself?' So this name popped into my head. He's someone who walks into a room and says, 'Hey everybody, it's Shockwave Supernova!' The kind of person you roll your eyes at and go, 'Oh no, who invited him?'."

At first, Satriani wasn't going to share the concept with the wider public, instead using it simply as a songwriting tool.

"It was a personal joke, because I'm a kind of shy retiring type," he explains, "but when you've got thousands of people looking at you, you can't just be ordinary. You've gotta pull that person out of you from time to time. I've learned to love this Shockwave Supernova character and its been quite a journey to pull things out of his psyche, out of his soul, and write songs about it."

It may be a curious technique, but it has produced arguably Satriani's most accessible and hook-laden album to date.

"My experience over all these decades of working on instrumental guitar music is you really have to understand restraint," he says. "Every second of the day, you have to say, 'Is this a real melody or am I just throwing my fingers around?'. I don't mind kicking back and playing a lot less if it means creating a memorable musical moment that's unique to a song's particular story. I do think this device helps me with that."

> "I've learned to love this Shockwave Supernova character and it's been quite a journey to pull things out of his psyche"

Satriani found that the cathartic nature of going through the process of writing the book and remastering his back catalogue meant that he was digging deep into his memory, and that also sparked his muse.

"You're looking at pictures that you keep way back in the drawer, you know?" he recalls.

HARP ATTACK

Satriani lays down his guitar briefly on *In My Pocket* to show off some smart harmonica skills. Joe first revealed his harp playing on 1989's *Flying In A Blue Dream* album, but he originally needed some coaching to get his playing up to scratch. "I had a really hard time teaching myself, and I wound up taking lessons from the great harp player out here in northern California, Norton Buffalo," he confesses. "Like with my singing, I'm kind of a pretender. I can do a couple of things, and I really love it, but that's about it. So what you're hearing is like 95 per cent enthusiasm and five per cent actual talent. It's like when you're confronted with a real singer – oh my god, some people are real singers and the rest of us can carry a tune. Only a real singer can really sing, and Norton was like that with the harp. When he played harmonica in front of you, you just realised he's a genius. I'm just blowing and sucking on this thing, but he was actually in touch with the finer points of the instrument and he was remarkable."

"'Yes, I did wear that. Oh my god!' It left me in this vulnerable state. I was off at home for a couple of months and I caught the H1N1 virus. It's the kind of flu you never want to get. I couldn't do much but just sit down and play guitar, which I did all day long. Out of that period came a lot of reflective music."

This is your life

The inspiration for the album hadn't yet hit Satriani by that point. It was to be another year of touring before everything came together, but much of that music was adapted to fit the peculiar narrative of Shockwave Supernova's life.

"I doubt anyone will ever approach me to bring it to Broadway!" he admits. "We do take liberties; theres one song, *There's No Heaven*, that has such an 80s vibe to it. The idea is Shockwave is thinking about who he was in the 80s and what he did. The device gave us artistic licence to say we can have a song that does that. Marco gave such an 80s drum attitude to it, I wound up using my vintage Roland JC120 on the rhythm guitars, and we just had fun with it. We had mixes where we really went nuts, well beyond the likes of The Cure in terms of how much you can chorus the guitar!"

The opening track, *Shockwave Supernova*, announces the arrival of our hero, and is a multi-guitar opening salvo. Almost the entire track is driven by slide, something that >

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Satch in more understated form in 1998, after the fashion excesses of the 80s and early 90s

has crept more and more into Joe's work. In unorthodox fashion, much of the bottleneck was done on a pair of 12-strings.

"That track has the largest amount of guitars on it," Joe explains. "John Cuniberti [Satriani's long-term producer] cleverly figured out how to put them all together and how to get it to work. Using 12-string as the main instrument is slightly different for me, I'm not quite sure I've ever done it. I think that probably Chickenfoot saw me using the 12-string as more of an out-front instrument. I've got an Ibanez double-neck that my back will not allow me to even wear! It was always on a stand, Sammy Hagar never let me forget how uncool it was that it was on a stand. So I've done a lot of slide work, unusual tunings, just using harmonics, but it was mostly just in the background.

"I was going to be clever with the bar. John was like, 'No, I want to hear slide!' So he forced me into it. We basically got 90 per cent through the whole thing with slide, and he would go 'OK, the thing just doesn't sound good at that note, that register on those strings, so we would swap guitars. The slide playing is split between a Korean-made Epiphone Les Paul 12-string, a vintage Candy Apple Red Fender Electric XII and a regular six-string Ibanez.

"We basically constructed the track so it's constantly switching between guitars; it could be only two fretted notes, and then it could go back to slide. It was mainly just because the instruments that we wanted to use were not in such good shape, so we had to get very clever with how we recorded it."

Another piece of kit that has become more prevalent in Satriani's work is the Sustainiac pickup, and it's used to its full potential on this record.

> "I've got an Ibanez double-neck that my back will not allow me to even wear! It was always on a stand, Sammy Hagar never let me forget how uncool it was"

"There are pieces of music on there where the melody was able to be a bit more expressive because I was using the Sustainiac," says Satriani. "It allows you to bring your volume down, and yet to have this unusual sort of sustain. The song *Butterfly Zebra* is a perfect example. My guitar's volume is actually on around four, but with the Sustainiac the notes are like droplets of water that you see forming and then take a long time to finally drop down. They have this quality about them that is quite unique."

Satriani first realised the potential of the Sustainiac when he saw Robert Fripp using it, but didn't opt to try one himself until around the time of his *Black Swans And Wormhole Wizards* album. "You know how guitar players are, you see somebody play into a pedal that you like and you go, 'I gotta get me one of those!' he laughs. "But then I thought, 'hold on a second, that's Robert's trick'. Then my good friend Neal Schon put them in his guitars, but Neal's approach was different, it was seamless. He didn't want to remind the audience that he was using it, he was just providing this beautifully sustained guitar. Then Steve Vai started to use them and, of course, we tour together all the time, so I'd watch him play his. He would use it both for melody and also for very theatrical moments where he'd be playing with his tongue or manipulating it some other way. I thought, 'OK Joe, if you buy one of those don't do any of that!' I found some unique ways of using it. It's sort of like a talkbox. If you buy one of those, the first thing that you think about is Peter Frampton, and then there's Bon Jovi and there's Joe Walsh. If you're gonna do it, you'd better do something different."

Satriani points out that there are two different types of these pickups currently on the market, the Sustainer – made by the Japanese company Fernandes – and the US-manufactured Sustainiac. Satriani opted to use the Sustainiac, because it gives him the ability – via the onboard toggle switch – to access three different octaves. "Ibanez >

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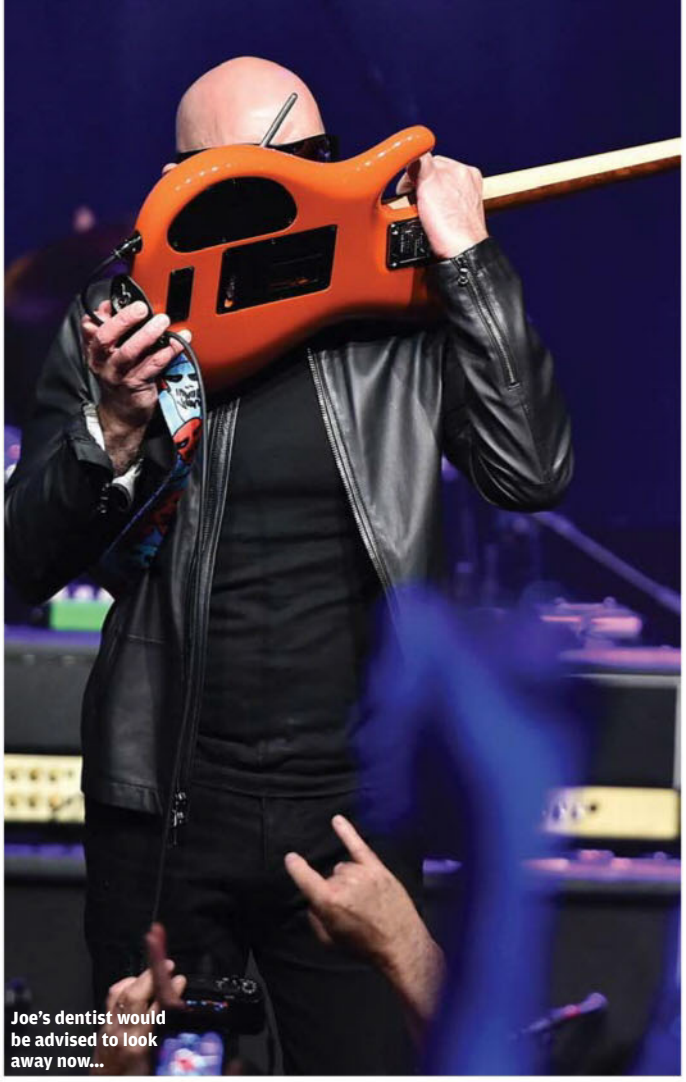
Playing an Ibanez JS2400 Chickenfoot model in 2013



Joe's dentist would be advised to look away now...

does not actually make a model with a Sustainiac yet, but it does seem to pair really well with my Ibanez guitars," explains Satriani. "I'm going between those switches all the time. I wound up putting them in all my touring guitars because it allowed us to have that flexibility of changing a setlist night after night."

Take it to the bridge

Satch has also developed a bit of a thing for EverTune bridges, which supply near-perfect intonation, as he explains: "I have about six various Ibanez prototypes with EverTunes installed on them. They come in handy now and then. You take one and you stick it in the stereo field somewhere, balance it against the other. They're great if you're trying to match the intonation of a keyboard or some other kind of instrument that has a perfect kind of intonation scheme. Although I have to say I don't mind the quirky nature of a regular guitar's intonation. The pushing and the pulling of intonation is sometimes what makes things exciting to listen to. It's the same as if you correct all the timing, you can just work the life out of something. We call it the intonation highway, and it's nice to have a really big one – several lanes rather than just a single road with no variation. There's no fun there."

Perhaps the most bombastic solo work on *Shockwave Supernova* appears on the track *On Peregrine Wings*, where Satriani was able to really let loose and put aside any notions of what people expect to hear from a Joe Satriani album.

> "I want to spark some kind of imagination in people. I don't want people always thinking, 'Is he playing enough notes?'"

"I was working on the solo section of the song, and initially I felt it should be very complex, but then I did the strangest thing," says Satriani. "I thought, 'What if it just became totally bonehead, and there was just this one bass note, just chugged?' So, reacting to the sound of a Marshall turned all the way up, I played a solo which I thought was very non-technical. It will probably anger some prog-heads. They will say, 'Hey! He's not picking every note'. If you don't play like you practise, some guitar players don't like it. Well fuck that! This is about a guy who's wearing alien wings for the first time and he's flying off the edge of a precipice; who cares about picking notes? I just wound up improvising this solo at home. When we got to the studio, John Cuniberti was like, 'I love that solo! It's so weird, it's like you start playing, and then hang onto this one note'."

Never fear, though, Satriani hasn't completely abandoned his esteemed cerebral musical philosophy and adopted a totally minimalist approach. Even within that same song, there are complex, structured ensemble parts, too. It's just that his new imaginary songwriting partner has finally freed him up from certain constraints.

"It's about going with the story of the song and not about Joe Satriani, professional guitarist," Joe insists. "The idea is that by the time the song ends, hopefully you're exhaling and you're going, 'Oh man, what a wild ride that was'. I want to spark some kind of imagination in people, so they can relate their own story to it. I don't want people always thinking, 'Is he playing enough notes?', or 'Is he picking upstrokes or downstrokes?' If you get stuck on it, that stuff will drive you mad, eventually."

LISTEN UP

JOE SATRIANI
Shockwave Supernova (2015)
An alter ego is let loose and this imaginary figure turns out to be something of a less is more man. An eclectic, hook-laden 15th outing.

JOE SATRIANI
The Complete Studio Recordings (2014)
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10 TOP TIPS

Guthrie Govan

Guthrie Govan is famed for his almost supernatural playing skills. Here, he puts pen to paper and shares 10 essential improvisation tips...

Live photography **Kris Claerhout**

1 THINK IN PHRASES

One specific way to apply the 'speech' analogy is to think in phrases when you play. Melodic ideas work generally on the basis of grouping several notes together and then leaving a gap – a pause for breath, if you will – and listeners will instinctively respond well to hearing ideas spaced out in this way. This is loosely equivalent to thinking one word (or small group of words) at a time, rather than one letter at a time... it's often easier to make sense when you're dealing with a smaller quantity of bigger ideas, rather than thinking on a purely note-by-note basis.

2 Develop your ear

Your ultimate improvisational goal should surely be this: the freedom to imagine any melody that you would like to hear coming out of your amplifier, coupled with the ability to translate that same sound instantly from your imagination directly onto your fingerboard. Therein lies total freedom... but, of course, developing this does require one fundamental asset: a good ear.

It's enormously beneficial to work on interval recognition and transcription skills, so do try to work out as much music as possible using just your ear. This admittedly takes some willpower, in a day and age when transcriptions and video tutorials are abundantly available for pretty much anything you could want to learn, but it's really worth making the effort to become a more self-sufficient player. If you're able to replicate what you hear someone else playing, that skill will help you immeasurably when you're trying to replicate the music you hear in your own head.

Do bear in mind that you'll end up with more well-rounded transcription chops if you aim to transcribe ideas culled from

as many different genres as possible: also, it doesn't hurt to work out some of what you hear being played by instruments other than guitar!

3 Mean what you play

I think it's important to establish a real connection with your instrument: your guitar should feel like part of you, rather than like some machine that you use to generate scale patterns.

To develop this kind of connection, it's really helpful to

"Having a musical conversation with yourself can help you to make more musical sense"

adopt the habit of singing what you play (think George Benson!). This eventually makes you feel as if you're actually responsible for the notes you play, rather than just relying on your fingers to execute a series of memorised patterns: if you can 'hear' the note you're about to play a split second before it comes through your amp, this will enhance the feeling that you caused that note to happen.

This approach, incidentally, is applicable not only to your improvisational moments but also, in a broader sense, to everything you play, including any new exercise or morsel of theory. If you can internalise what that kind of knowledge sounds like, in addition to what it looks and feels like, you'll eventually absorb it in a much more musically useful way!

4 Explore rhythm

You can get a lot more mileage out of the licks you already know by experimenting with rhythmic variations. Having some degree of familiarity with concepts such as rhythmic displacement and polyrhythms can give you a lot more freedom in terms of how much you can draw from your existing bag of licks before you start to repeat yourself!

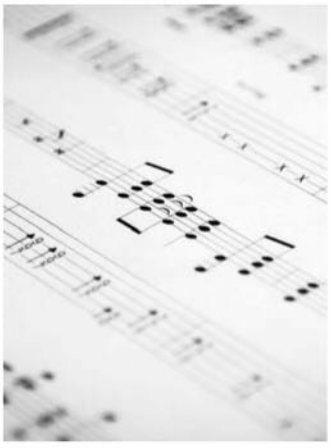
5 Listen

We all find ourselves feeling devoid of inspiration from time to time: even if you have the most finely honed ear imaginable, there might be times when you just can't think of anything worth playing. This dilemma can be addressed simply by expanding your listening diet: by constantly seeking out fresh music and trying to listen to it actively and intelligently, you'll absorb all kinds of new phrasing ideas on a subconscious level, and aspects of this will start to emerge in your playing, keeping things sounding reassuringly fresh. This is essentially a musical version of the old adage: "you are what you eat"!

6 Listen some more

The previous tips have applied mostly to things you can do when you're practising – things that help you to prepare for those improvisational moments. Here's one that applies to 'The Moment' itself...

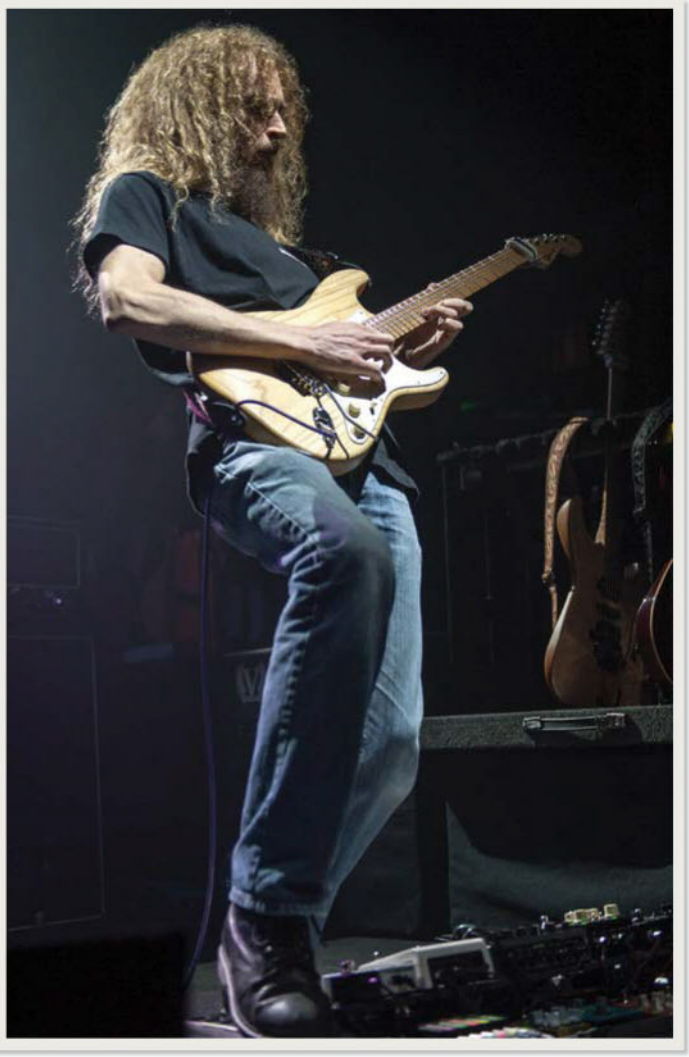
If you're on stage somewhere and your inspiration suddenly dries up, try to become more aware of what everyone else in the band is doing. Striving to have a musical conversation with your fellow musicians will generate an atmosphere that's much more conducive to creativity... if you keep yourself confined within your own little guitarist bubble, it can be much harder to conjure a meaningful musical statement out of thin air, because you'll be oblivious to all kinds of external stimuli, which could otherwise be serving as inspirational triggers.

Odd though it may sound, having a similar kind of musical conversation with yourself can sometimes help you to make more musical sense: if you're >

7 COMMUNICATE NATURALLY

I've encountered a lot of players who are intimidated by the idea of improvisation. Perhaps not surprisingly, the players who find it the hardest to 'let themselves go' are typically the ones who devote the bulk of their practice time to working on technical exercises and learning transcriptions of other people's music – after all, your strengths and weaknesses as a player are invariably a product of how you choose to spend your time with the instrument...

One way to overcome such fear is to remember that music is essentially just a language, and then to consider this: as soon as we put the instrument down and revert to using the more 'familiar' language in which we speak to each other on a daily basis, every one of us becomes a fluent improviser. When talking, we can effortlessly and spontaneously express a wide range of feelings and thoughts, frequently applying complex rules of grammar and syntax in the process, without even being consciously aware of what we're doing (when did you ever catch yourself wondering, mid-conversation, whether the verb you were about to use was transitive or intransitive? When have you ever made a conscious decision to use the subjunctive mood?).

So... the fundamental trick to becoming a more fluid and natural improviser surely lies simply in trying to make playing feel more like talking. Like so many skills, this becomes a little easier every time you do it; in basic terms, the best way to improve your improvisation skills is simply to improvise a lot!



"It's good to take risks now and then. Obsessive perfectionism can hamper your flow"

having difficulty working out what to play next, it can often be helpful to try to think back to the last phrase you played and then try somehow to expand on that... taking a kind of question and answer approach.

8 Beware of over-thinking

Thinking about scales, theory, phrasing, etc can be very helpful when you're practising at home, but there's also a time for simply 'using The Force' and trusting your instincts. In my experience, a lot of your most musical and effective improvisational moments will almost certainly occur when you're not thinking about anything at all.

To borrow some wise words from the mighty Charlie Parker: "You've got to learn your instrument. Then you practise, practise, practise. And then, when you finally get up there on the bandstand, forget all that and just wail."

9 Be reckless if necessary and enjoy yourself

It's good to take risks every now and then. Obsessive perfectionism can hamper your flow: sometimes, it's better to try an idea without knowing for sure whether it will work or not, as opposed to playing it safe all the time. When you're improvising, you have the freedom to do whatever you want to, so... why not embrace that freedom and enjoy it?!

LISTEN UP

GUTHRIE GOVAN
Erotic Cakes (2006)

If you are wondering why many call Guthrie the best guitarist on the planet, this is the instrumental solo album that elevated him to premier league status. Blistering.

STEVEN WILSON
Hand. Cannot. Erase. (2015)

The Porcupine Tree mainman's fourth solo album is a modern prog opus that sees Wilson use heavily-effected ambience in order to put the brakes on Guthrie's naturally speedy inclinations.

THE ARISTOCRATS
Tres Caballeros (2015)

The latest LP from Govan, Minnemann and Beller finds the outrageously virtuosic trio in fine form, with arguably their most fun and accessible release to date.

10 APPLY THEORY WITH MUSICALITY

There's no harm in learning as many scales and arpeggios as possible – quite the opposite, in fact – but some players seem to expect scales to solve problems that in fact they were never designed to solve. You use scales when you improvise in much the same way that you would use the alphabet when writing a poem – an essential part of the process though it may be, the alphabet alone is obviously not enough!

As soon as you've learned the shape (and sound) of any given scale, try jumbling the notes up in as many ways as possible – and be wary of traps such as always starting from the lowest note! It can be helpful to fire up an appropriate backing track and play the scale at an excruciatingly slow speed, counter-intuitive though this may feel, as doing so will help you to develop some sense of the different 'colour' and mood evoked by each component note. You can use the component notes of a scale much more musically if you're aware of the unique character that each one possesses, relative to the harmonic context.

As a related 'rut-buster', one interesting approach is to spend some time improvising whole phrases on just one string: this forces you to think more 'vocally' and prevents your fingers from merely relying on a series of rehearsed patterns.

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Not fade away

Rhythm King and ex-Rolling Stone Bill Wyman thrums bass and takes lead vocals on *Back To Basics* – a long-awaited return to solo work. **ALAN CLAYSON** explores his life and times...

Story **Alan Clayson** | Photography **Getty Images**

Since his amicable departure from The Rolling Stones in 1993, Bill Wyman has been most conspicuous as founder of The Rhythm Kings, a flexible amalgam that he compares to "a football team – if someone gets injured or is called away to something more lucrative, we bring in a substitute."

Some gifted personnel appear on Wyman's new album, *Back To Basics* – only his fifth solo offering – executed as proficiently as you might expect by musicians of the calibre of guitarists Terry Taylor – a Wyman accomplice for decades – Guy Fletcher (ex-Dire Straits) and former Paul McCartney sideman Robbie McIntosh. Other players to pass through the ranks of The Rhythm Kings have included Albert Lee, Andy Fairweather Low, Mark Knopfler, Mick Taylor, Eric Clapton, George Harrison and Peter Frampton – known to Wyman since 1964.

"He was 14 then," remembers Wyman of his first encounter with Frampton, "and about to join The Preachers, who evolved from The Cliftons, the group I left in order to join the Stones. He replaced my friend Steve Carroll – with whom I first started to play music, when we were both clerks in a south-east London department store.

"Steve was a magical guitarist, who could hear a Chuck Berry riff once and just play it straight off. He died in a car crash in 1964, three days into the Stones' first tour of the States. Andy Bown, who was in The Preachers and then The Herd with Peter, reckoned Steve was 'the greatest guitar player the world never heard'."

Long before he teamed up with Carroll, it had been Wyman's fancy – unspoken at first – that he'd like to make his way in the world as a professional musician. "It became my ambition when my aunt took me to a dance in 1946 when I was 10," he recalls. "She did the jitterbug with an American soldier to a big band, but it seemed far-fetched to imagine I'd ever be in one – because they were all trained musicians, who'd practised six hours a days for years.

> "Steve Carroll was a magical guitarist, who could hear a Chuck Berry riff and play it straight off"
> **BILL WYMAN**

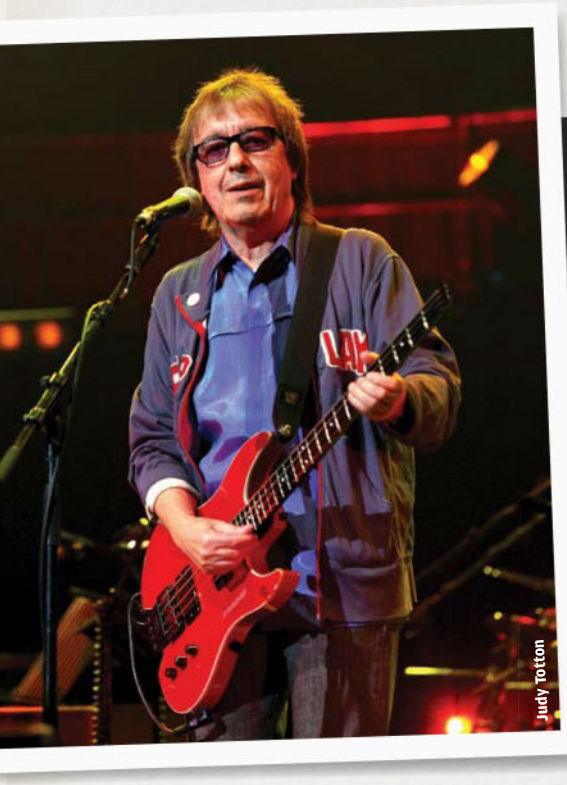
Yet I did have piano lessons, and passed a few Royal College of Music exams."

Nevertheless, Wyman entered the world of work as a bookmaker's clerk, a job that lasted until the dreaded envelope that hung like a sword of Damocles over every young Englishman landed on the doormat one morning in 1955. The War Office, anxious about the deadlock the Geneva Summit had reached over the reunification of Germany and a correlated abandonment of east-west defences, sent for Wyman. When posted to the British zone of a still-occupied Fatherland, how could Wyman have known how fateful it was to purchase for a few Deutschmarks an acoustic guitar with taut strings so high off the fretboard that barre chords proved painful to the as-yet uncalloused fingers on his young hands? "I also heard the beginnings of rock 'n' roll on American Forces radio," he says. "Back in England, a couple of months before I was demobbed, I formed a skiffle group with another serviceman, Brian Cassar – Casey Jones – a Liverpudlian who came to know The Beatles. Later, he was in Casey Jones And The Engineers, which had Eric Clapton and Tom McGuinness in briefly." >

GEAR *Bill Wyman*

- **BASS GUITAR** The Bass Centre 'Wyman' Bass: "It's a copy of the one I built in 1961 – which I no longer use because I'm scared of losing it. It's worth a fortune."
- **AMPS** "As long as it's an Ampeg with an 18-inch speaker, I'm alright."

Wyman reunited on stage with his old Stones bandmate Keith Richards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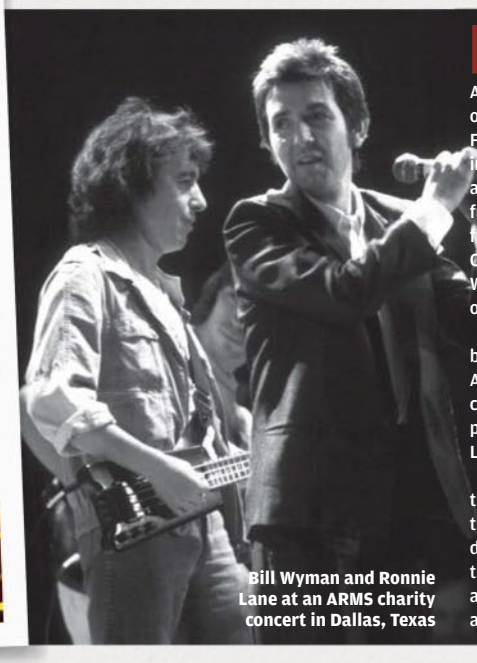
Bill Wyman and Ronnie Lane at an ARMS charity concert in Dallas, Texas

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Among Bill's various charitable work from the 1980s onwards has been the shouldering of much of ex-Small Faces bass player Ronnie Lane's load in organising galas in aid of Action For Muscular Sclerosis (ARMS), initially as one of a 'supergroup' at a Royal Albert Hall fundraiser. Further such spectaculars hinged on a more fixed set-up: guest players round a nucleus of Wyman, Charlie Watts, Chris Rea and Andy Fairweather Low as Willie And The Poor Boys. In a half-hour in-concert video of the same title, Ringo Starr appeared in a cameo role.

He and Wyman also launched a Beatle-Stone business liaison via joint investment in a restaurant in Atlanta. The official launch of 'The Brasserie' in 1986 concluded with a jam session in which the Englishmen presided over the oddly-matched roisterings of Jerry Lee Lewis, Isaac Hayes and Jermaine Jackson.

Wyman's appetite for catering was not dampened by the ultimate failure of The Brasserie – as evidenced by the opening of his Sticky Fingers diner in London, despite awareness that "Five restaurants had failed on that site before, but we've won all sorts of awards since, and Sticky Fingers is now on a par with the Hard Rock and Planet Hollywood."

On returning to civvy street in 1958, Bill was moonlighting from his day job as a Clifton. He spent what amounted to six weeks' wages on a Burns electric guitar and, after a period of feeding it through a tape recorder, a state-of-the-art Watkins Westminster amplifier. As the combo's 'bass player', he tuned his instrument down and, on one occasion, wound bass strings onto it. Then came a 'road to Damascus' moment during a weekend he spent with relatives in Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire. On the Saturday, they'd attended a bash by a local combo, The Barron Knights. "All I remembered about it was the power and fat sound of Barron Anthony's electric bass, the first time I'd ever heard one. That was what was missing in The Cliftons," says Wyman.

So it was that the gear loaded onto the group's van was to include a 30-watt bass amplifier built via instructions in *Radio Rentals* magazine. It was combined with a coffin-like cabinet with an 18-inch Goodmans speaker – and a concrete base that, supposedly, thickened the tone, but also cured its inclination to creep forward or even keel over on rickety stages. This energised a second-hand instrument of indeterminate make, customised by Wyman, chiefly by the removal of all the frets. "It was the first fretless bass ever," he says, "years before their commercial manufacture."

A further indication that Wyman meant business was his purchase of a spare amplifier – a Vox AC30 – as insurance against it being needed should the home-made one fall silent on, say, that nights-of-nights in 1962 when the group had a brush with fame as accompanists to Dickie Pride, a diminutive one-hit-wonder, whose onstage convulsions had earned him the nickname 'The Sheik Of Shake'. That and a support for The Paramounts (later Procol Harum) were the twin peaks of The Cliftons' two-year career, during which they were otherwise not much different from any other act in virtually any town in the country who traded in classic rock and current hits.

> "Until I joined the Stones – on 7 December, 1962 – I didn't know much about blues"
>
> **BILL WYMAN**

"Until I joined the Stones – on 7 December, 1962 – I didn't know much about blues," Wyman admits. "I'd never heard of Muddy Waters, Bo Diddley and artists like that, mainly because you never heard them on the radio, or were able to buy their records. I'd come across Josh White and Big Bill Broonzy, but regarded them more as folk singers. However, I soon became as fanatical about blues as Mick [Jagger], Keith [Richards] and Brian [Jones] were already – though I still stayed fond of rock 'n' roll. It was through me, for example, that the Stones did Eddie Cochran's *Twenty Flight Rock* much later on."

The rest, as they often say, is history – and, following the release of *Come On*, the Stones' maiden single, Bill was sucked into a vortex of events, places and situations that hadn't even belonged to speculation when he was a Clifton. If the tourbus had drawn up outside a stadium on Pluto, it mightn't have seemed all that odd.

Vox cajoled Wyman into endorsing its Teardrop model, even calling it 'The Wyman Bass'. Yet he admits now, "I didn't like it. It had my name on it, but I wasn't consulted about the design. I also played a see-through Plexiglass Fender Mustang for a while but, again, that was a bit too big for me. That's why I held it vertically – because that's the only way I could reach the frets."

It was, however, the Bill Wyman Signature Bass, constructed by London's Bass Centre, that pulsated when Bill reunited with the Stones at the capital's O2 Arena for two nights only in November 2012. It remains the instrument he employs in The Rhythm Kings, and it's also to the fore on *Back To Basics*, which finds the legendary bass man in complete command of his artistic faculties, with certain of its selections – instanced by the 'November' slice of his autobiography and *I Got Time*, a blues transported by time machine from the 1930s – among the finest compositions in his catalogue. Certainly, the album needs no association with famous friends, past and present, to enhance its intrinsic worth.

LISTEN UP

THE ROLLING STONES
Their Satanic Majesties Request (1967)
This psychedelic album contained *In Another Land*, one of only two Stones originals attributed solely to Wyman.

BILL WYMAN
Bill Wyman (1982)
(Si Si) Je Suis Un Rock Star and *A New Fashion* were spin-off hit 45s from this, Wyman's third solo outing. The bassist handled much of the instrumentation himself.

BILL WYMAN
Back To Basics (2015)
Wyman emotes in a husk as charming as that of Ian Dury on his first album as a solo artist since 1992's *Stuff*, released at

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JERRY DONAHUE

Nothing More, the new boxset from British folk-rock band Fotheringay, features unheard songs written decades ago. **LARS MULLEN** talks to founder member Jerry Donahue...

Story **Lars Mullen**

"Late in 2014, I was informed that a set of tapes had surfaced of a festival gig that Fotheringay did (featuring the late Sandy Denny), in Rotterdam in 1970," says renowned string-bending master of the Telecaster Jerry Donahue.

"These reel to reel tapes had originally been wrapped incognito and sent to Chris Blackwell, the founder of Island Records. It would seem that this package had been sat, unopened, in a dusty corner of the Island Records offices for 45 years."

Former Fairport Convention lead singer Sandy Denny formed Fotheringay in 1970. In its short-lived, but hectic one-year time-span, the band managed to record a debut record, *Fotheringay*, still regarded as one of the best albums of its kind. *Fotheringay 2*, released in 2008, featured unreleased and remastered material, and was thought to be the last of any original recordings, until the concert tape was discovered.

"I was both totally floored and excited when I heard the quality of the recording," Jerry explains. "The band really is on form, and Sandy sounds amazing. I soon realised that there was enough previously unheard material to release the full live concert as part of a four-disc boxset. *Nothing More* includes the two studio albums, the full Rotterdam concert, seven previously unheard BBC recordings and a DVD of the band performing on German TV's *Beat Club* programme, which was huge during the 60s and 70s.

"*Nothing More* was released in the spring of 2015 and coincides with the release of Mick Houghton's biography on Sandy Denny, *I've Always Kept A Unicorn*. On the strength of this album, and the fact that there are still a lot of our original fans out there, I was encouraged by Island Records to put a band together, initially just for the odd gig.

"Fortunately, the other two surviving Fotheringay members, Pat Donaldson on bass and Gerry Conway on drums, were more than eager, so it made sense to take it further, rehearse and organise a tour.

"We also recruited PJ Wright, who plays with TRADarrr and The Dylan Project, on guitar and vocals, but the hardest task was to find a replacement to fill Sandy's role. We agreed two girl singers would mitigate any direct comparisons to Sandy, but we still needed the very best, and fortunately both Sally Barker and Kathryn Roberts were available! We're so lucky to have these fabulous ladies in the band. Sally fronted The Poozies and was a finalist on the TV show, *The Voice*. Kathryn and her husband Sean Lakeman were voted best folk duo of the year by the BBC. When these two girls sing together, it really is a treat. Sally and Kathryn have a similar vocal range to Sandy, so we've kept the keys the same. Each has a vocal character of their own, which works incredibly well."

It can often be a daunting exercise when a longstanding band rehearses the same songs they have played over the years in preparation for the next tour. As Jerry explains, the Fotheringay camp was buzzing with enthusiasm, song after song. He continues: "When we started rehearsing for the summer tour, it was just a treasure. Pat and Gerry are a dynamite rhythm

section, and it all just came flooding back. We kept the song arrangements more or less the same as the originals, tracks like *The Way I Feel* (a Gordon Lightfoot song) stand out, with PJ, Sally and Kathryn all together on vocals.

"This was the track that induced me to join Fotheringay, when I hadn't wanted to. You see, in the months leading up to 1970, I'd been in a band with Dave Peacock [later of Chas & Dave fame], and I'd had no intention of leaving. However, Pat Donaldson persuaded me to at least come to a rehearsal. It took only that one number to totally turn me around.

"We did so much in that initial year of the band's life. However, the second album, that we'd nearly finished, was shelved when Sandy was cajoled into going solo, upon her winning her second consecutive Top British Female Vocalist of the Year award in *Melody Maker* magazine. Iconic mainstream singers at the time included Petula Clarke, Sandie Shaw and Dusty Springfield, who were way ahead of their game, then Sandy, a folk-rock singer comes out of the woodwork and wins Female Vocalist Of The Year... twice.

"So we weren't that surprised when Island Records lost interest in the rest of the band. But it obviously wasn't what the audience wanted. It was like Paul McCartney winning a vocal award and being told to leave The Beatles. Sadly, Sandy's solo career steadily waned, and she passed away in '78. The release of *Fotheringay 2* in 2008 sparked new interest in the band, and Island Records started to take note again, hence they are in full support of *Nothing More*, which has taken the whole concept to a new level.

"The original recordings were made on an eight-track machine, using one-inch tape, which I had transferred to digital for far easier editing and mixing. What we liked about tape was the fact that if it was driven hard, just short of distorting, it would add a warmth, a compressed quality that digital recording won't add. Digital reproduces exactly what it hears, but if the material is recorded on tape first then swapped over to digital, then the recordings are reproduced along with all the original sonic characteristics of the tape."

> "It was like Paul McCartney winning a vocal award and being told to leave The Beatles"

Donahue is renowned for his string bending techniques, and for years has been a Fender man and a fan of vintage instruments.

"I've played Telecasters for years," he says, "having worked with a number of companies on JD models. Right now, I'm using my Fret-King JD Artist Series model, which tips its hat towards a Tele, but with much of my own design input. I asked for the body to have a more soft-edge feel to it, but more importantly, I wanted custom wiring.

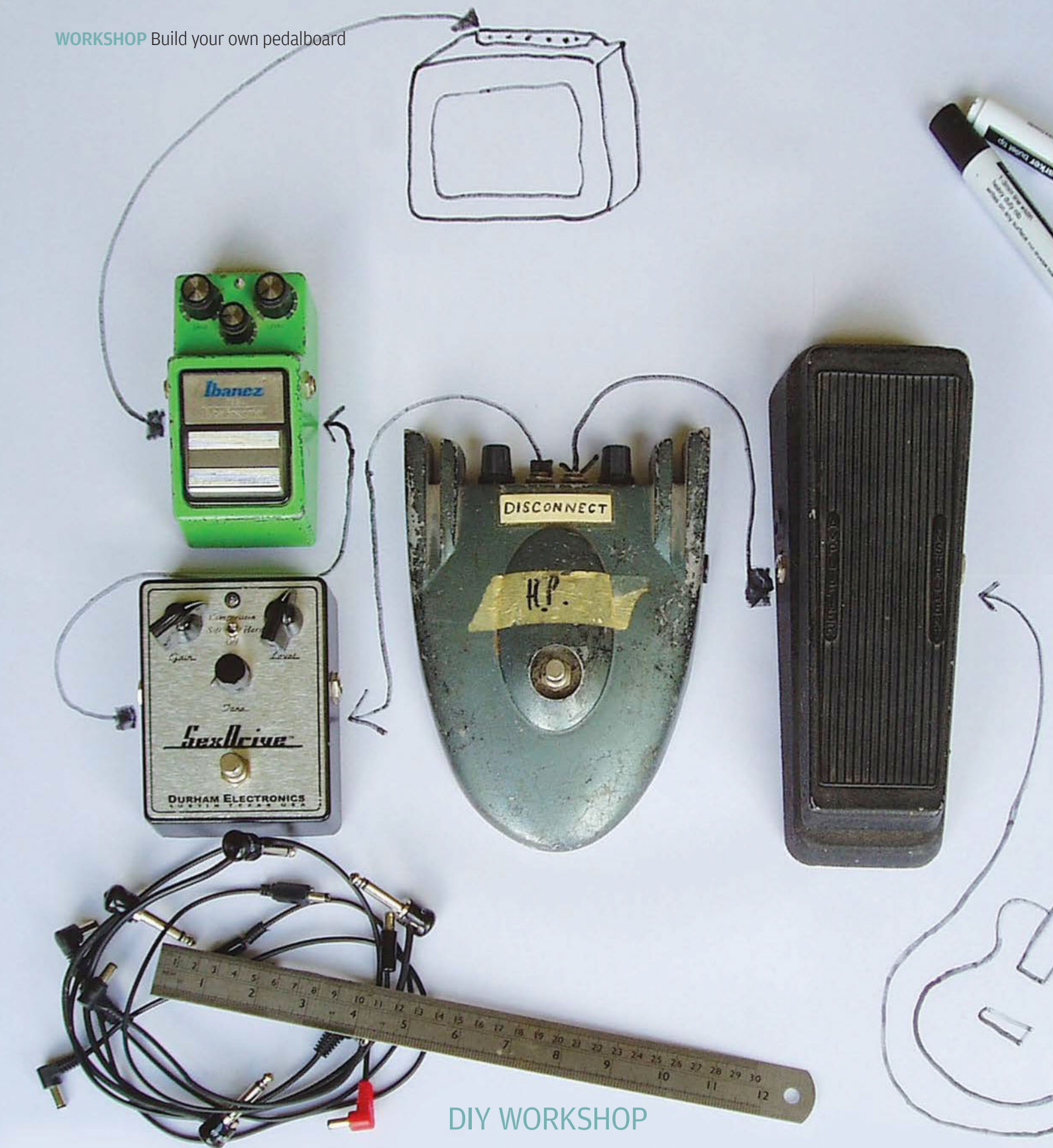
"Back in the day, depending on the song, I used to swap between a Tele and a Strat for their individual tonal characteristics and outputs; the strength of one was often the weakness of the other. I worked with Trevor Wilkinson to reproduce the classic clucky Strat tones in positions two and four on a five-way switch, from a Tele pickup configuration. I was always told it worked on a Strat because of the close proximity of its pickups affecting the interplay of the magnetic fields. The result is that hugely popular 'quack' tone, which we've managed to replicate with capacitors and a controlled degree of reversed phase.

"I now have my favourite Strat sounds added to the Tele sounds via a proprietary five-way switch. So I get the best of both worlds on one guitar. I'm a longstanding Vox fan, and have a black tolex '62 AC30, which I keep in the USA, but for a band like Fotheringay, an AC15 is ample. I don't have much on the pedalboard, an Xvive Fzone V5 delay and Lemon Squeezer compressor, and there's a Nobels ODR-1 overdrive when needed – a lot of my playing is fairly clean.

"Part two of our 2015 UK tour takes place towards the end of the year, and the setlist will contain songs from the first album, including *Nothing More*, *Winter Winds*, *Banks Of The Nile* and *The Sea*. From the second, *Late November*, *John The Gun*, *Bold Jack Donahue* and *Gypsy Davey* are included.

"We're planning to take on international tours and work on new material; we still have some really cool unrecorded songs from way back ready to record."

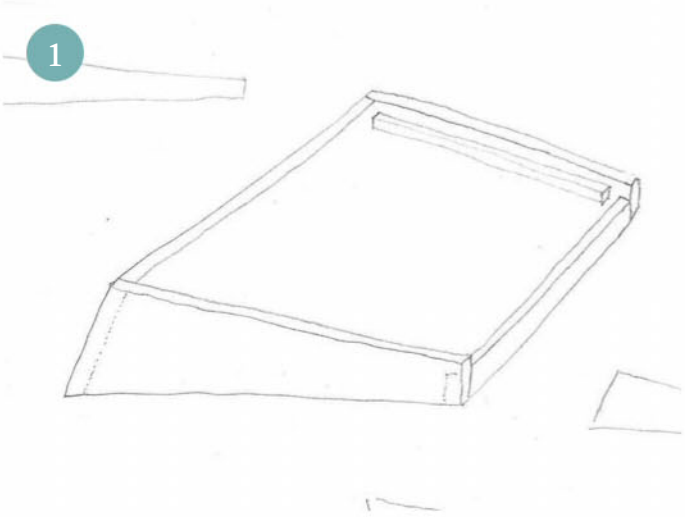
Check out www.fotheringay.com for more information on the band and their forthcoming UK tour

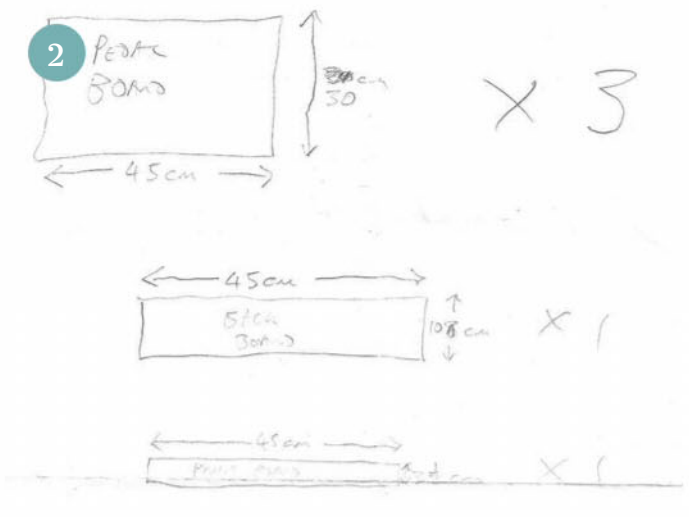


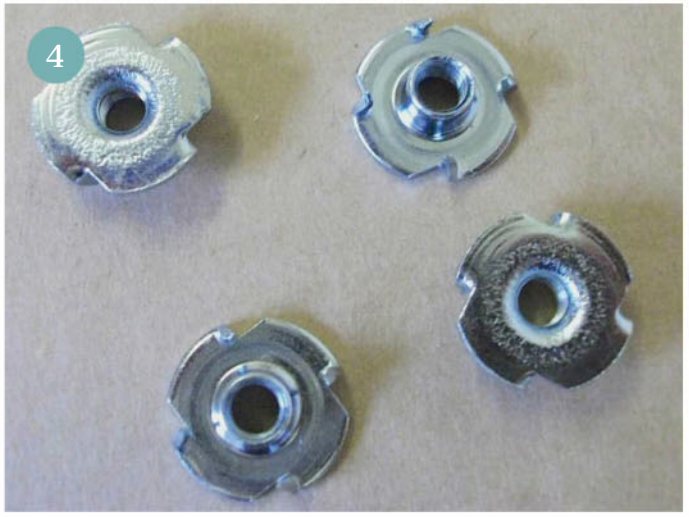
DIY WORKSHOP

BUILD YOUR OWN PEDALBOARD

If none of the pedalboards on the market float your boat, it's fairly straightforward to make your own – and save a few pennies into the bargain. **HUW PRICE** puts on his woodworking apron and safety goggles...







To accompany our extensive cover feature on compact pedalboards, this month we decided to have a go at building a small board from scratch. However, instead of following the ubiquitous Pedaltrain-type formula, we came up with a few of our own twists. The first priority for our design was to keep the power supply off the top of the board so it wouldn't take up precious stompbox space. Secondly, we wanted to slant the board to provide easier access to all of the pedals and, thirdly, we wanted to make the system modular.

The thinking behind the modular approach was to build a small pedalboard frame with a fixed but accessible power supply and a removable top section. This would allow us to put together several boards for different styles of playing, that could be dropped into the frame and hooked up within a matter of minutes.

For instance, you could have a blues board with a wah, fuzz, overdrive and clean boost. Or what about a spaghetti western board with a Fuzzrite-style fuzz, delay, tremolo/vibrato and reverb? Or how about a funk board with a wah, envelope filter, phaser and compressor?

The possibilities of the modular system are almost endless, and the advantages are that you won't be obliged to carry around a massive board loaded with seldom-used pedals, or endure the hassle of stripping down and rebuilding your board every time you need a different set of effects.

What's more, you'll need to buy only one power supply, so you may be able to afford a really good one with properly regulated and electronically isolated outputs. Smaller boards with fewer pedals also mean shorter cable runs, which equates to better tone and lower noise levels.

Drawing board

Regardless of the time I spend planning out things in my mind, issues always come to light when I start sketching ideas. Regardless, this was intended to be a simple project, and it wasn't too hard to figure out.

The rear panel had to be tall enough to accommodate the power supply unit and the front panel needed to be tall enough to provide sufficient gluing surface area to bond with the sides. I also wanted the rear panel to slant, in order for it to form a right angle with the top panel so the power supply outlets would sit flush with the surface.

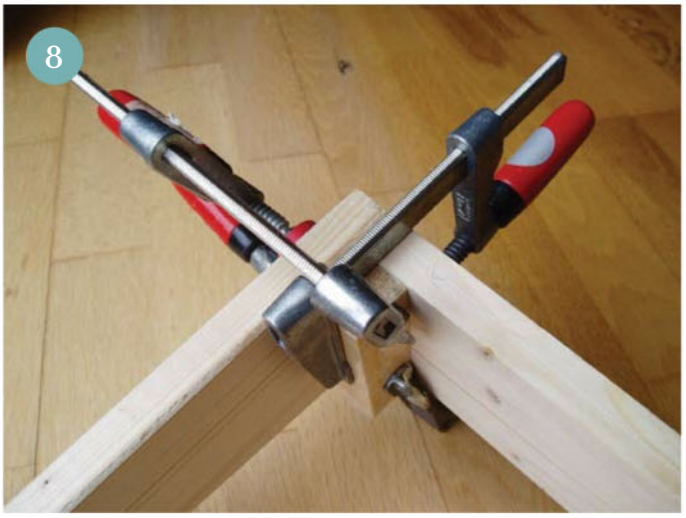
The best way to decide on the dimensions of the board itself is to place the pedals you intend using onto a large sheet of white paper and arrange them into an order you're happy with. You can trace around the pedals themselves and draw in the interconnects to figure out the cable lengths >

1 Drawing out your ideas always helps. You'll usually pick up errors during the design stage, and you'll be able to refine your ideas

2 Once you have decided on your design, take a diagram with all the dimensions to the DIY shop

3 Laying everything out is another useful procedure

4 Captive nuts have spikes on the bottom to hold them in place. Drill holes in your support batons to accommodate the captive nuts and tap them into place. You might find a dab of epoxy glue will help to keep them fixed



5 With the boards cut out, the fun is about to start

6 Box joints are quite easy to cut and provide extra surface area for the glue. This adds strength and also helps to achieve properly square corners

7 With the joints cut, it's always a good idea to do a dry assembly before using glue. If there are any issues, it's best to find out about them before they're irreversible

8 A short length of baton helps to keep the joints square while the glue sets. Wrapping the batons with plastic tape also ensures they won't stick to the frame

you'll need. Arranging your pedals will also help you to determine the shape and size of the board.

Listing the parts

Another benefit of going through a proper design process is that you will be able to draw up a comprehensive parts list. I made every effort to come up with a design that could be built with readily available materials, and it's always preferable to get everything you need in a single trip.

You could use MDF, plywood or hardwood to construct the frame, but I decided to cut up a pine shelf I had laying around. Pine isn't the strongest material, but it seems to last well enough in old Fender amps, and it has the advantage of being light.

For the board itself, I was lucky to find some MDF offcuts in B&Q. Most DIY outlets offering wood cutting services have a selection of offcuts, so it always pays to look around. I was able to buy enough MDF to make four boards for just £4. I also bought some planed 25mm square baton to make supports for the board.

The design called for bolts and captive nuts to secure the boards to the frame, and to keep things neat, I went for countersink heads with cup washers.

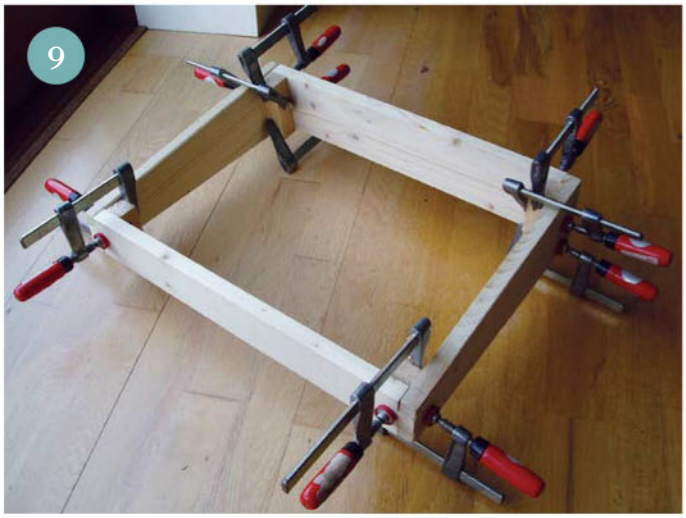
Constructing the frame

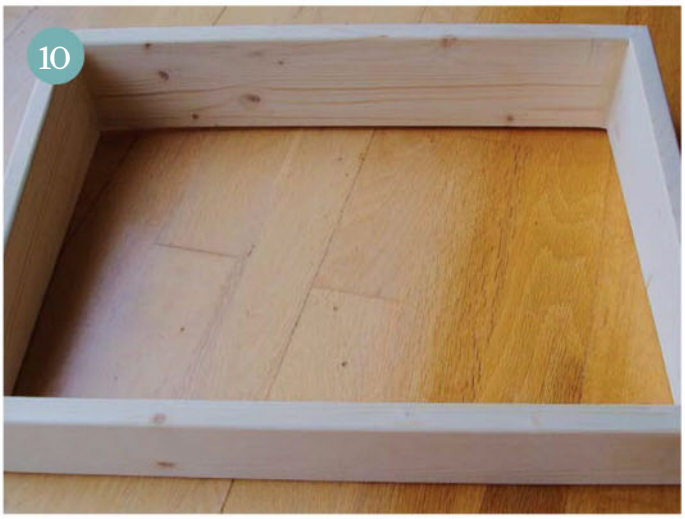
Before I got onto the fun stuff, I had to go through the laborious process of cutting the pine to the correct shape and size. I drew the lines onto the wood with a pencil, then cut it with a regular handsaw. Fortunately, pine is easy to cut, especially if you remember to draw the saw teeth over a wax candle from time to time.

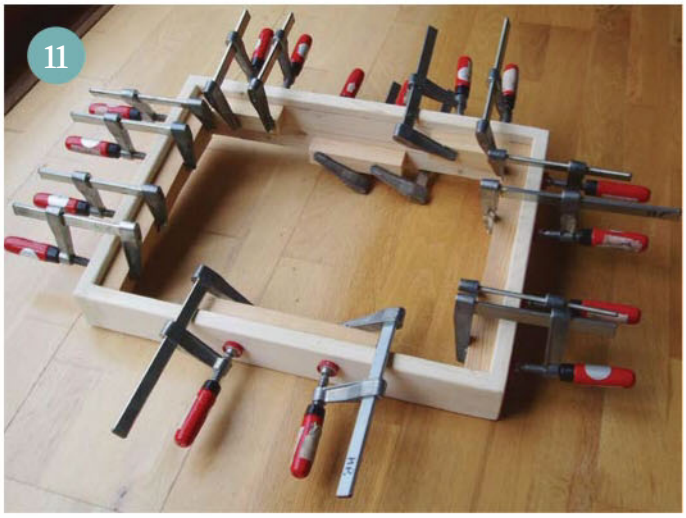
The whole process took me about 30 minutes, but it you're fortunate enough to own a band saw you'll be a lot faster and the edges will be neater. To tidy things up, I clamped the sides together in my workbench and trued the edges with a jackplane.

The most crucial thing is to end up with properly square corner joints once your frame is glued up. For this project, I decided to use simple box joints to maximise the surface area for the glue, but you could use square batons instead. To make the cut-outs, I sawed down into the wood then used a chisel to notch them out.

Make sure you do a dry assembly to ensure everything fits and lines up properly before you apply any glue. I was pleasantly surprised that my frame ended up with very square corners without having to jiggle things around. For this project, regular PVA wood glue should be fine. I used Titebond Original because it has a fair amount of 'open time', when you can still make adjustments. It also sets rock-hard and has never let me down.







Titebond sticks to wood but not plastic, so I cut some short lengths of square baton and wrapped them in packing tape to help with clamping. Working on one corner at a time, I applied the glue to all of the mating surfaces and spread it out evenly before putting the pieces together.

If you have made fairly tight box joints, the glue might make it harder to get everything nice and snug. So keep a soft mallet handy to tap the pieces into position. After checking the angle with a set square, I pushed a piece of plastic-covered baton into the inside corner and used three G clamps to hold everything together while I waited for the glue to dry.

I left the frame clamped up overnight, and was pleased with the outcome. However, there were more than a few gaps and imperfections. Don't worry if, like me, joinery isn't your forte, because filler is your friend. Two pack wood filler is much like car filler, and comes in a tin with a tube of hardener that has to be mixed into the filler paste. It can fill any gaps, it dries quickly and sands easily, too. Once painted, you'll never know it's there.

Adding support

The plan was to cover the top boards with carpet tiles and drop them into the frame, so I had to glue lengths of baton onto the inside edges of the frame to support the board. The batons also had to be glued at a depth that would allow the top of the carpet tile to be level with the top edges of the frame.

All that was needed was to mark out the gluing lines. But before attaching the side batons, I had to drill four bolt holes and press captive nuts into the underside of the batons. Notice how I left enough space on the back panel for the power supply and fixed another piece of baton towards the bottom of the panel for the power supply to rest on.

Applying the finish

When you're painting over an imperfect surface, it also helps to use textured paint with a matt finish. For this project, I decided to try a textured stone effect finish. Available in aerosols, you can buy this type of finish in most DIY and craft supply outlets. Since I was also painting over bare wood, I first sprayed some all-surface primer. It helps to use a primer that's a close colour match to your chosen top coat.

This was nothing like painting a guitar. I simply laid down a large sheet of polythene in my back yard, weighted down the corners and gave the frame a blast. The stone effect went on better than I expected and made the frame look as if it had been moulded from concrete, but it took a few days before it felt completely dry, >

9 Immediately everything is glued and clamped, you should check all the corners for squareness and make adjustments while you still can. Once you're happy, leave the glue to set for a few hours – preferably overnight

10 With the clamps removed, you can use two pack wood filler on any gaps and imperfections. Once the filler is sanded, your pedalboard frame should look something like this

11 All the support batons can be glued at once. For stage use, it might be a wise precaution to use screws as well as glue. Or maybe run some bolts through the frame and the batons

12 The stone effect paint wasn't cheap, but the textured surface looks really good and masks any irregularities. Make sure you use a primer that's a decent colour match for your top coat

13 Spraying is best done outdoors, but make sure you protect areas where you don't want the paint to go

14 Exposed connections guarantee that you will experience an electric shock at some point, so make sure you buy an insulating cover for your IEC socket. This one is wedged into place in a very tight hole on the back panel of the pedalboard. You can also use cable ties to hold the cover in position

15 Here's the IEC mains socket from the outside

16 We wanted to make the cut-outs in the pedalboards as neat as possible, so we made a router template from a scrap piece of MDF to use with a bearing bit. It took a little extra time, but we think the end result is worth it. Be very careful when working with routers, though

and it's too soon as I write this to comment on its durability.

Powering up

I certainly didn't want a mains cable dangling out of the back, so I decided to install an IEC socket. Remember, safety is more important than looking good, so you need to buy an insulation cover along with the IEC socket to ensure no metal parts are exposed. I bought mine from Maplin (see parts list for details).

I cut the cable coming from the power supply to the shortest possible length and pushed it through the hole I cut for the IEC socket in the back panel. The cover was pushed over the cable, and once the wires were soldered to the socket I pulled the cover over the back of the socket.

The trick was to make the IEC cut-out a very tight fit. I was able to get the socket started into the cut-out, then I used a soft mallet to tap it gently into place. The cover ended up wedged firmly between the socket and the wood, and two self tapping screws were used to fix the socket in position.

Shaping the boards

Cutting the boards required nothing more than marking the lines directly onto the MDF, cutting them out with a hand saw and cleaning up the edges with sandpaper. However, I did make a routing template to ensure the power supply cut-outs would be as neat as possible.

Once I was done with the routing, I dropped each board into the frame, clamped it in position and drilled through from the back, using the captive nuts to guide the bits. With the bolt holes marked out, I then used a larger bit to increase the diameter.

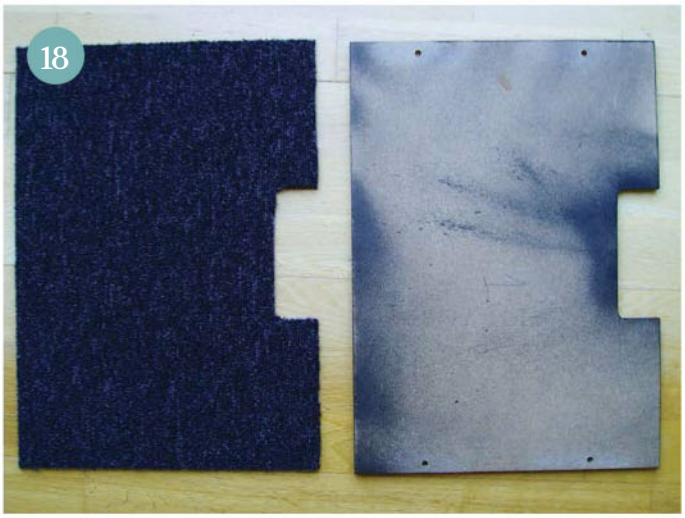
I had chosen dark grey carpet tiles, so I decided to spray the edges of the boards black. Before attaching the carpet, it had to be cut to size. I laid each board over the back of a tile and cut around it with a Stanley knife. When you do this, be careful with your fingers!

To fix the carpet, you could use carpet tape, but I preferred contact adhesive – and the stuff in aerosols makes the job easy. A soldering iron does a fine job of punching out the bolt holes in the carpet tile, and it has the added benefit of melting the edges to prevent fraying. In fact, you can run the iron along the cut edges of the tile to melt any straggly bits, but do it outside because the smell is dreadful.

Verdict

All that remained was to bolt down one of the boards and load up some pedals. This design worked out pretty well, but there are some refinements that could be made, depending on your requirements.

For instance, you could split the top board, which would enable you



PARTS SUPPLIERS

- **IEC socket** Maplin code: HL15R
- **IEC socket insulation cover** Maplin code: JK66W
- **Timber, paint, bolts and carpet tiles** any decent DIY outlet or timber merchants

to leave certain pedals permanently installed while you swap others. These could include a tuner, an AB switch, a wah or your number one overdrive. Since the board is so small and cheap to build, you could even make two of them and use them side by side or angled for convenience. Without pedals attached, the frame weighs only 2.5Kg, and swapping over the boards takes about two and a half minutes – so long as you use a powered screwdriver. Costs will depend on whether you have any spare wood, but even if you have to buy everything your outlay shouldn't exceed £40. Good luck, and please send us pictures if you give this project a go.

NEXT MONTH...

We restore a 1956 Fender Vibrolux to its former glory, replacing faulty and incorrect parts, switching out the 10-inch speaker baffle and installing a 12-inch speaker, and taking a close look at the circuitry inside this beautiful amp, that is still being gigged regularly 60 years after it was built.

17 Here are the three boards we made, with cut-outs for the power supply and two holes for the fixing bolts on each side

18 This piece of carpet has been cut to size and is ready to be glued to the MDF board. Notice how we sprayed the edges of the top board black before fixing the carpet tile

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GRETSCH G9555 NEW YORKER ARCHTOP WITH PICKUP £539
ELECTRIC GUITAR

Gretsch G9555 New Yorker Archtop with Pickup

When rock 'n' roll was in its infancy, most electric guitars looked like this. **CHRIS VINNICOMBE** needs no excuse to go retro...

Guitar & Bass AWARD CHOICE 9/10

The original Gretsch 6050 New Yorker was introduced as a budget archtop in the mid-1940s. Relaunched as part of the company's Roots Collection in 2014, NAMM 2015 saw the electrified version arrive with a recreation of the DeArmond Rhythm Chief 1000 pickup: a vintage-style fingerboard-mounted single coil with a rubberised magnet.

The New Yorker features an arched solid spruce top finished in an attractive satin sunburst with laminated maple back and sides and a satisfyingly chunky, vintage-style V-shaped mahogany neck. The intonation-compensated rosewood bridge is floating and, strung at the factory with a set of half-round .012-.052 strings and a wound G, the whole package is unapologetically old-school.

The aforementioned floating pickup is governed by a single master volume with a nicely retro amber knob mounted on the oversized tortoiseshell scratchplate. The volume pot arrived a little loose, with the potentiometer itself rotating beneath the pickguard when making volume adjustments. Removing the knob and tightening the nut helps, but this sort of arrangement will often come loose with prolonged use. Adding another washer helps to stabilise things and neither this, nor the odd finish imperfection, are deal breakers when you take into account the sub-£500 street price.

In use

The New Yorker winds back the clock to the period before the dawn of the solidbody electric. For many modern guitarists, using an instrument such as this requires a mindset shift. At just over 16 inches in width, the New Yorker's Grand Auditorium-style proportions are comfortable when playing seated. It comes factory fitted with only one strap button, so if you want to stand then you'll have to fit another to the heel or use the shoelace method.

The low end is huge and sonorous, and suited to open D tuning – but that doesn't mean the high end is woolly

As you might expect, when played unplugged there's considerably less volume, sustain and bass than from a similarly-sized Western acoustic, but it has a charming, rootsy breeziness that's perfect for living-room strumming. With a strong attack and a hard pick, there's a decent hot club jazz voice, too.

Plugged into a small tweed combo, we're again reminded how liberating a single-pickup guitar can be. Naturally, given the pickup position at the end of the fretboard, there's no shortage of bass – the low end is huge and sonorous, and suited particularly to open D tuning – but thankfully that doesn't mean the high end is woolly; in fact, it's as sweet or as biting as your right hand dictates. There's a wide frequency separation between thumb and fingers when fingerpicking, and the New Yorker would make an excellent choice for solo live performers. The rosewood bridge lends character to the sound; dig in with a pick down at the bridge, into lots of spring reverb, and you'll be rewarded with a woody lead voice that's ideal for early 1960s Brit R&B.

Despite its primitive appearance, the New Yorker does more than retro sounds; it would be equally at home in the context of latter-day Radiohead. Hollowbody construction means volume and gain bring feedback, but working with the limitations produces inspiring results – try using a looper to lay down clean chords, then play overdriven single-note lines on top, using swelling feedback for an Ebow-like effect.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE... **Guild's Newark St. Collection T-50 Slim £789** is a thinline single-pickup hollowbody with an arched maple top. **Godin's 5th Avenue Kingpin £599** has Canadian wild cherry body construction and a beautiful vintage-style finish.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Comfortable V-shaped neck
+ Surprisingly versatile electric tones
+ Bags of vintage vibe
– Volume pot could be fastened more securely

A genuinely inspiring archtop at a great price, that screams 'play me'. This guitar has songs in it!

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Gretsch G9555 New Yorker Archtop with Pickup

- **PRICE** £539
- **DESCRIPTION** Hollowbody archtop electro-acoustic. Manufactured in China
- **BUILD** Solid spruce top with oversized f-holes, maple laminate back and sides. Parallel tone bar bracing. Set mahogany neck with vintage V-profile. 240mm (9.45") radius rosewood fingerboard with 19 vintage tall frets and dot inlays
- **HARDWARE** Floating rosewood bridge, nickel-plated trapeze tailpiece, Grover Sta-Tite open-geared tuners
- **ELECTRICS** Vintage-style fingerboard-mounted single-coil pickup with master volume
- **SCALE LENGTH** 635mm/25"
- **NECK WIDTH** 45mm at nut, 56mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 23mm at first fret, 26mm at 9th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 40mm at nut, 55mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 2.3kgs/5.1lbs
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISHES** Antique Burst only
- **CONTACT** Fender UK & ROI 01342 331700 **www.gretschguitars.com**

Danelectro DC59 12-String

The sound of an electric 12-string unifies an extraordinarily wide range of guitarists. **MARCUS LEADLEY** checks out an affordable retro option

Guitar & Bass AWARD CHOICE 9/10

KEY FEATURES

Danelectro DC59

- **DESCRIPTION** electric 12-string guitar. Made in Korea
- **PRICE** £499 (no case)
- **BUILD** Masonite and laminated pine body, bolt-on maple neck with 21-fret, 14"/355 mm radius rosewood fingerboard. Aluminium nut
- **HARDWARE** Danelectro adjustable 12-string bridge; individual, adjustable machineheads
- **ELECTRICS** 2x Danelectro lipstick single-coil pickups, master tone and volume, 3-way pickup selector.
- **SCALE LENGTH** 25"/635mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 452mm at nut, 548mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 210mm at first fret, 240mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 380mm at nut, 552mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 6lbs/2.72kg
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISHES** Tobacco Sunburst, Cherry Sunburst
- **CONTACT** John Hornby Skewes 01132 865 381 **www.jhs.co.uk**

The chime of an electric 12-string is hugely evocative. Most guitar fans think immediately of the dramatic opening chord in *A Hard Day's Night* in 1964, or the intro to The Byrds' version of *Mr Tambourine Man* from the following year, both of which helped cement the electric 12 in the sonic vocabulary of the 60s. Rediscovered for the rock ballads of the 70s and 80s, the richly layered sound makes the simplest of riffs sound memorable.

It's a very bright sound, but one that suits the wide tonal palate, and you get a good sense of mid and bass character

In a supporting role behind vocals, it fills out the sound stage, adding body and richness. However, by the same token, it might not be a sound you want to use all the time – so shelling out the big money associated with vintage classics and their reissues might not be a top priority. Enter the Danelectro DC59 12-string – at a fraction of the price, it's all set to produce some classic jangle.

There are original vintage Dano 12-strings, such as the 1N-12 and the Bellzouki, but this new model is a contemporary formula based on one of the most famous body shapes in the guitar landscape. As always, contemporary Danelectros are accurate budget reissues of budget guitars, so here you get a body that's constructed using a laminated pine frame covered with Masonite, and a bolt-on maple neck with a rosewood fingerboard. The body is hollow, so it's extraordinarily resonant, and this model is vented with a classic-style f-hole for good measure.

The feel and playability of a 12-string really depends on getting a lot of factors working together, and here's an instrument with a great-feeling neck and a low action that wants to stay in tune. While vintage Danelectros tend to suffer from under-designed bridges, this fully adjustable chrome unit sits solidly on the body.

It's a very well thought-out design with six strings passing though the body and six anchoring at the back of the bridge. From here, the strings travel up to a well-machined aluminium nut (another bit of Dano signature design) and on to individual, adjustable machineheads. The electrics are deceptively simple: two Alnico-based lipstick pickups (so named because of the shape of the metal cases), master tone and volume controls and a three-way toggle selector.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE... For authentic 60s looks and sounds, you'll need **£1,300** for a **Rickenbacker 330 reissue**. If it's the excesses of the 70s you want, go the whole hog and buy a **Gibson EDS-1275 doubleneck £3,500**. For a bargain, try **Italia's Rimini 12 String £749**.

In use

The bridge pickup instantly delivers a classic 60s-style 12-string twang. It's a very bright sound, but one that suits the wide tonal palate, and you still get a good sense of mid and bass character. The tone control is good, as it enables you to roll off some of the top end to create a flatter sound that sits back in the mix while still having plenty of presence. Moving on to the twin-pickup voice, we encounter another Danelectro quirk; the pickups are wired in series, so instead of hum-bucking phase cancellation we get a higher output sound that's very full and rounded with a contemporary hi-fi character.

The neck pickup offers a deeper voice, where more of the acoustic character comes across. While there's a tendency to run this DC59 into a clean amp, a little grit's sometimes required if you're looking to emulate the sounds of The Beatles or The Byrds, as this reflects the character of the era's amplification. Compression and spring reverb never go amiss, either.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Great for both vintage and contemporary tones
+ Excellent singer/songwriter tool
+ Very good quality for the price

- Limited applications
- The 'in-series' middle-position tone may not be for everyone

A well-made, likeable, contemporary electric 12-string with a budget price tag, that delivers all those vintage tones – and it even manages to look the part

9/10

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Strandberg Boden 8 Custom Shop

Despite the retro-obsessed nature of our industry, some guitar makers continue to innovate. **CHRIS VINNICOMBE** takes a walk on the wild side...

KEY FEATURES

Strandberg Boden 8

- **PRICE** €4,400
- **DESCRIPTION** 8-string headless electric with a chambered swamp ash body and flame maple top. Bolt-on EndurNeck profile Caribbean rosewood/carbon fibre/maple laminate neck with a 16-20" compound radius ebony fretboard with Luminlay dot side and fret markers, 24 jumbo fanned frets plus zero fret. Made in the USA
- **HARDWARE** Black Strandberg EGS Series 4 fixed bridge and string locks
- **ELECTRICS** Seymour Duncan Custom Shop Slanted Pegasus & Sentient pickups, three-way toggle pickup selector, master volume, master tone
- **SCALE LENGTH** 711-673mm/28-26.5"
- **NECK WIDTH** 60mm at nut, 70mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 19mm at first fret, 20mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 52mm at nut, 80mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 2.5kgs/5.5lbs
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Swedish-made Made To Measure instruments only. See website for details
- **FINISHES** Fangorn (green over black) Satin; numerous other options available
- **OPTIONS** Specify body, top, fingerboard material, pickup choice, hardware colour and more when ordering
- **CONTACT** Strandberg Guitars **www.strandbergguitars.eu**

Full disclosure: a headless, fanned fret eight-string couldn't be further out of this writer's comfort zone if it was a saxophone. But sometimes that's the point; as musicians, if we keep playing the same boxes, with the same sounds, on the same instruments then we'll never break out of our stylistic cul-de-sacs. And even if we're more than happy in familiar territory, it's fun to be a tourist sometimes. Thus, the editor of your beloved magazine, whose favourite guitar and amplifier designs of all time originate from before 1963, finds himself in temporary charge of an electric guitar that's about as highly evolved and modernistic as it gets.

Based 45 miles north of Stockholm in Uppsala, Sweden, Ola Strandberg has found favour with the progressive metal community, and the Boden 8 combines elements of instruments he created in response to the requirements of such djentlemen as Misha Mansoor, Tosin Abasi and Chris Letchford. It's a visually striking guitar, but the really clever stuff comes in the shape of the neck.

Strandberg's patented EndurNeck has a kind of asymmetrical profile made up of three flat surfaces. It's thinner on the treble side and thicker on the bass side towards the nut, almost parallel behind the seventh fret, getting thinner on the bass side and thicker on the treble side as the neck approaches the body. The result promotes better hand posture when playing and reduces stress on muscles, joints and tendons. It also makes rhythm playing easier towards the nut and lead playing easier at the body end, which is further assisted by a compound fretboard radius that flattens out in the upper reaches.

It's a much more luxurious ride than the extended-range designs we've played that utilise a more conventional neck

In use

The almost holistic design approach has the desired effect; what seems initially to be an intimidatingly wide playing surface quickly feels comfortable, and it's a much more luxurious ride than the extended-range designs we've played that utilise a more conventional neck shape. The fanned frets also help keep those big lower strings sufficiently taut and well-intonated and the higher strings easy to bend.

The Seymour Duncan Custom Shop pickups will do the djent thing with authority, of course, but it's important to emphasise that seven- and eight-string guitars aren't just for prog metal; check out jazz virtuoso Charlie Hunter as an example of how far they can go in a dramatically different direction. We enjoyed exploiting the Boden 8's vast bass response and high-end clarity when playing moody arpeggios into reverb and delay – when layering parts using an instrument with this kind of range you can always find the space for melody and lead lines.

The EndurNeck makes for easier rhythm playing near the nut and easier lead work at the body end

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE... For an ultra-affordable route into 8-string guitar, the **Ibanez RG8 £349** and **Jackson JS32-8Q £302** are difficult to beat. Also look out for the forthcoming **Ibanez RG-8 Fanned Fret Iron Label** if multi-scale appeals.

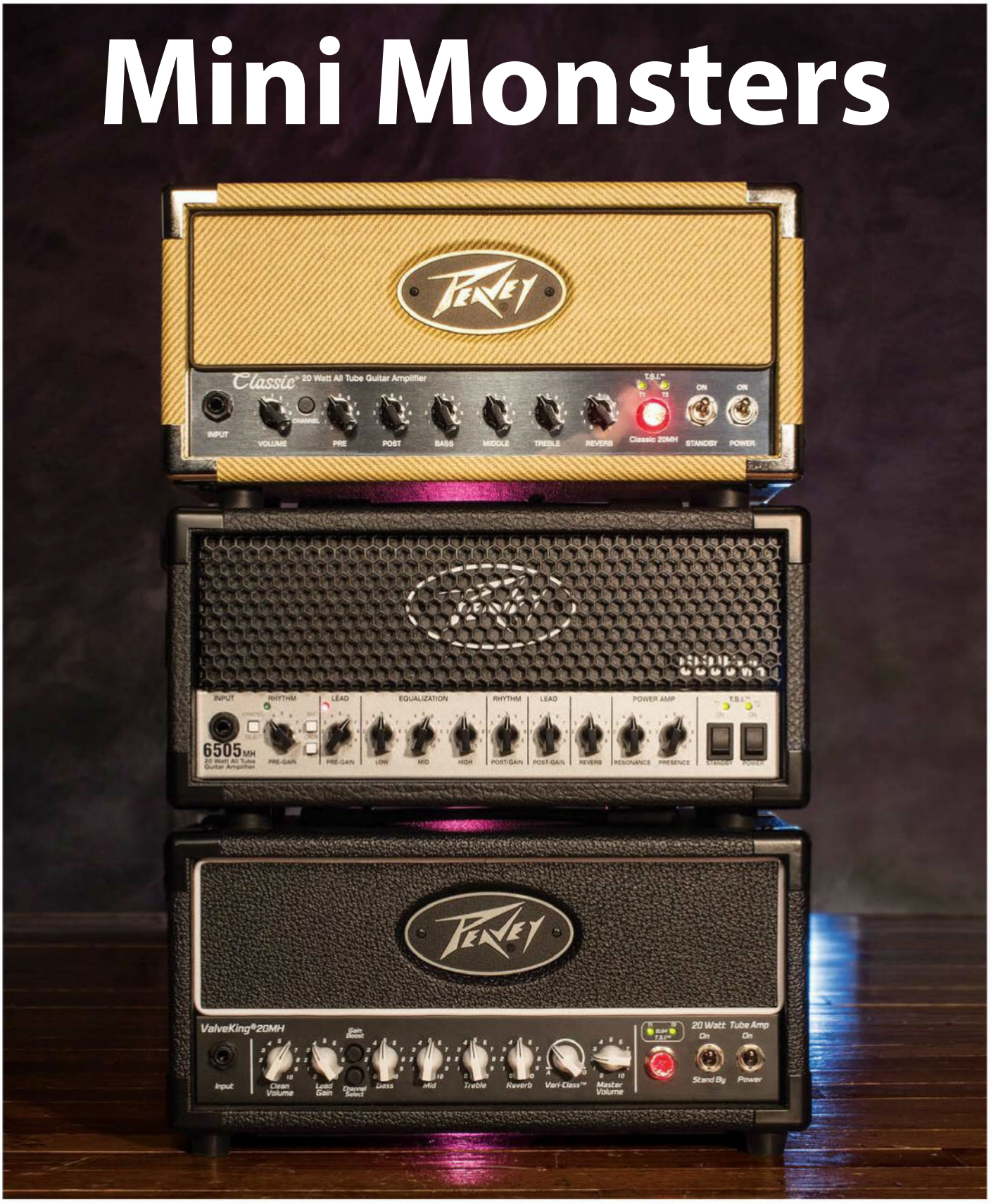
Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Cerebral approach to design pays dividends for the player
+ Excellent balance for such a light guitar, thanks to reduced weight at the headstock end
+ Extremely portable in the supplied, high-quality gigbag
- The price of admission is high

If you are serious about investing in a cutting-edge extended range instrument, your search ends here

8/10

Mini Monsters



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FENDER HOT ROD DEVILLE ML 212 £849
AMPLIFICATION

Fender Hot Rod DeVille ML 212

Simplified doesn't always mean simple. **HUW PRICE** checks out sessioneer supreme Michael Landau's new, pedal-friendly combo

It all sprang from a chance encounter while out on the road. US session ace and sidekick to the stars Michael Landau was playing rented backline roulette on tour, and one night, he ended up with a Fender Hot Rod DeVille. When he plugged his pedalboard into the clean channel, Landau thought it sounded great and handled pedals as well as any amp he had ever used.

Fender's Custom Shop had already produced a signature model Stratocaster for Landau, so a signature amp seemed logical. Having already adopted the Hot Rod DeVille as his 'playing out' amp of choice, Landau requested a DeVille devoid of features he didn't use, along with a handful of choice modifications.

The Celestion G12V won a speaker shoot-out because Landau found it the best match for the circuit and the cabinet, with a fat, creamy and fizz-free tone in the upper registers. He requested soldered speaker connections, too.

Landau is no fan of two-channel amps, having found that shared equaliser controls always result in compromise. Consequently, the regular DeVille overdrive channel was ditched and designer Stan Cody was asked to provide extra clean headroom and a more natural transition from clean to overdrive.

The result of that brief is a one-channel Hot Rod DeVille with two footswitchable volume controls and a boost. Effects loop connections are provided on the top panel and a full-sized spring reverb tank nestles in the bottom of the open-back cabinet.

In Use

This amp is designed for a specific purpose, so let's discuss what it doesn't do from the get-go. If easy overdrive, overdrive and distortion textures rather than valve-derived saturation.

Of course, it can't deliver vast swathes of sounds, like a three-channel Boogie or a modelling amp. Instead, it's about variations on a theme, but to call the ML 212 non-versatile would be unjust. Within its design parameters, it's a fairly sophisticated tone shaper.

Landau is no fan of two-channel amps, having found that shared equaliser controls always result in compromise

touch compression and chewy mids are your thing, the ML 212 is not going to be the amp for you. It's also bulky, weighty and very loud.

We're talking big and clear guitar tones with ample clean headroom, and it's geared towards Landau's stated preference for a sonically pure platform that he can control with stompbox

Starting with both volume controls set identically, I could hear no tonal difference between volumes 1 and 2. Although the ML 212 is described as a two-channel amp by Fender, Landau's description of a one-channel amp with switchable volume controls seems >

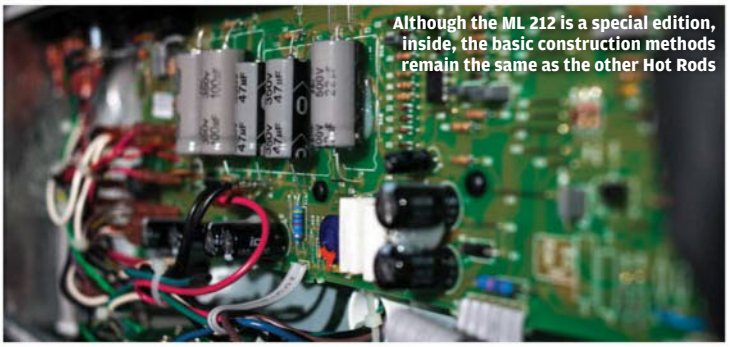
As on all new Hot Rod amps, the control panel is black rather than chrome

KEY FEATURES

Fender Hot Rod DeVille ML 212

- **PRICE** £849
- **DESCRIPTION** 60-watt, one-channel 2x12 valve combo with effects loop and reverb, made in Mexico
- **POWER RATING** 60 watts
- **VALVES** 3x 12AX7, 2x 6L6
- **FRONT PANEL** 2 inputs, normal/bright switch, volume 1, boost switch, volume 2, treble, bass, middle, volume select switch, reverb, presence, preamp out, power amp in, footswitch socket, standby, power switch
- **REAR PANEL** 2x 4-ohm speaker outputs
- **SPEAKER** 2x Celestion G12V-70
- **DIMENSIONS** 533x616x107.5mm
- **WEIGHT** 62lbs/28.2kg
- **CONTACT** Fender UK & ROI 01342 331700 **www.fender.com**

This stylish Landau insignia plate distinguishes the amp from a standard DeVille


Although the ML 212 is a special edition, inside, the basic construction methods remain the same as the other Hot Rods

Landau's speaker of choice is the Celestion G12V

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
The most obvious alternative is a regular **Fender Hot Rod DeVille £701** and a pair of **Celestion G12V-70s £120**, which works out more expensive than the **ML 212**'s street price. The **Koch Twintone II £952** is loaded with a single **Celestion G12V-90** and the **EVH 5150 III £1,013** has two G12Ms.

more accurate. I'll call them side 1 and side 2 for simplicity.

The boost functions only when side 2 is selected. The volume lift is preset, but it's sensible and usable rather than giving you an excessive volume and gain hike. In practice, I found it roughly equivalent to turning up the volume control by around one and a half increments. It's also accompanied by a reduction in edginess and a mild midrange boost, so there are a couple of ways you can use this feature.

The first and most obvious is to use side 2 for a tonally consistent volume lift, with boost providing an additional volume lift for solos – with all the frequencies that can sound edgy at higher volume levels knocked off. The alternative approach is to keep the boost feature engaged and set side 2 at the point where it's more or less on a par with side 1.

The second option gives a subtly different voicing when side 2 is selected, so long as you can get your head around using boost as a tone shaper rather than a level control. Simply engage the boost then roll side 2's volume control back and the ML 212 will start to feel more like a two-channel amp.

Side 1 sounds more scooped, clear and glassy in the traditional, iconic big Fender style. In contrast, side 2 has fuller mids and a hint of breakup, along with softer treble when boosted. It's not a world of difference, but I found that side 1 lends itself to clean arpeggios and rhythm parts played with a more delicate touch. With side 2 boosted, it encourages you to dig in to feel more of the natural compression and subtle breakup. Although the ML 212's emphasis is firmly on clean tone, it's not relentlessly clean or uninspiring, as old silverface Twin Reverbs can be. A regular Stratocaster will push side 1 into overdrive as the volume control reaches about halfway, and when boosted side 2 begins overdriving a notch or two earlier.

The presence control has a big influence on feel and breakup. The onset of overdrive can be hastened by turning the presence right up, and you will certainly feel the ML 212's response soften. Inevitably, you'll need to turn the treble control down, but this adds yet another dimension to the amp.

Before moving on to the subject of effects pedals, the onboard reverb deserves some attention. The effect comes on rapidly, and before the control is even halfway up it becomes absolutely cavernous. Maxed out, it's even louder than the dry signal, and the longish decay time would make it unusable for all but psycho-surfers.

The ML 212's ability to meld with pedals is indeed uncanny. The sonic characteristics of various overdrive stompboxes shine right through, but they all integrate as if they're part of the amp. Similarly, echo effects melt into the reverb and modulation pedals shimmy with the treble.

The ML 212 is a devastatingly loud amp, that is intended primarily for stage work. I had to find a bigger than usual room to test it, because it was too powerful for my work space. Personally, I didn't miss having an overdrive channel at all, since I have never regarded it as being the DeVille's crowning glory.

There is something majestic about big-box Fender clean tone, and I got a genuine thrill out of playing through the ML 212. Although it may seem like a simplified version of the Hot Rod DeVille, this is a far more subtle and sophisticated amp. Factor in its uncanny ability to complement pedals, and both Landau and Cody can consider this mission accomplished.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Sweet, big-box Fender tone
+ High clean headroom
+ Footswitchable volume & boost
+ Footswitch is supplied
+ Luscious reverb

– Tolex covering slightly untidy in places
– Look elsewhere for overdrive

The ML 212 is designed for players who prefer using pedals to shape their tone with a clean, high-volume valve amp. On that basis, it's a very fine-sounding product

8/10

D'Angelico

New York

Never underestimate a lightweight.

The smallest of all the D'Angelico archtops, the EX-SS packs a lot of punch in its 15-inch body. Boasting a rich, full-bodied low-end when on the neck pickup and a powerful mid-range on the bridge pickup, the SS sings. Kent Armstrong humbuckers deliver the crisp attack and balanced resonance ideal for live performance. The EX-SS shines when kept clean or boosted with overdrive, perfect for blues, jazz, rock, and all the nameless places in between.

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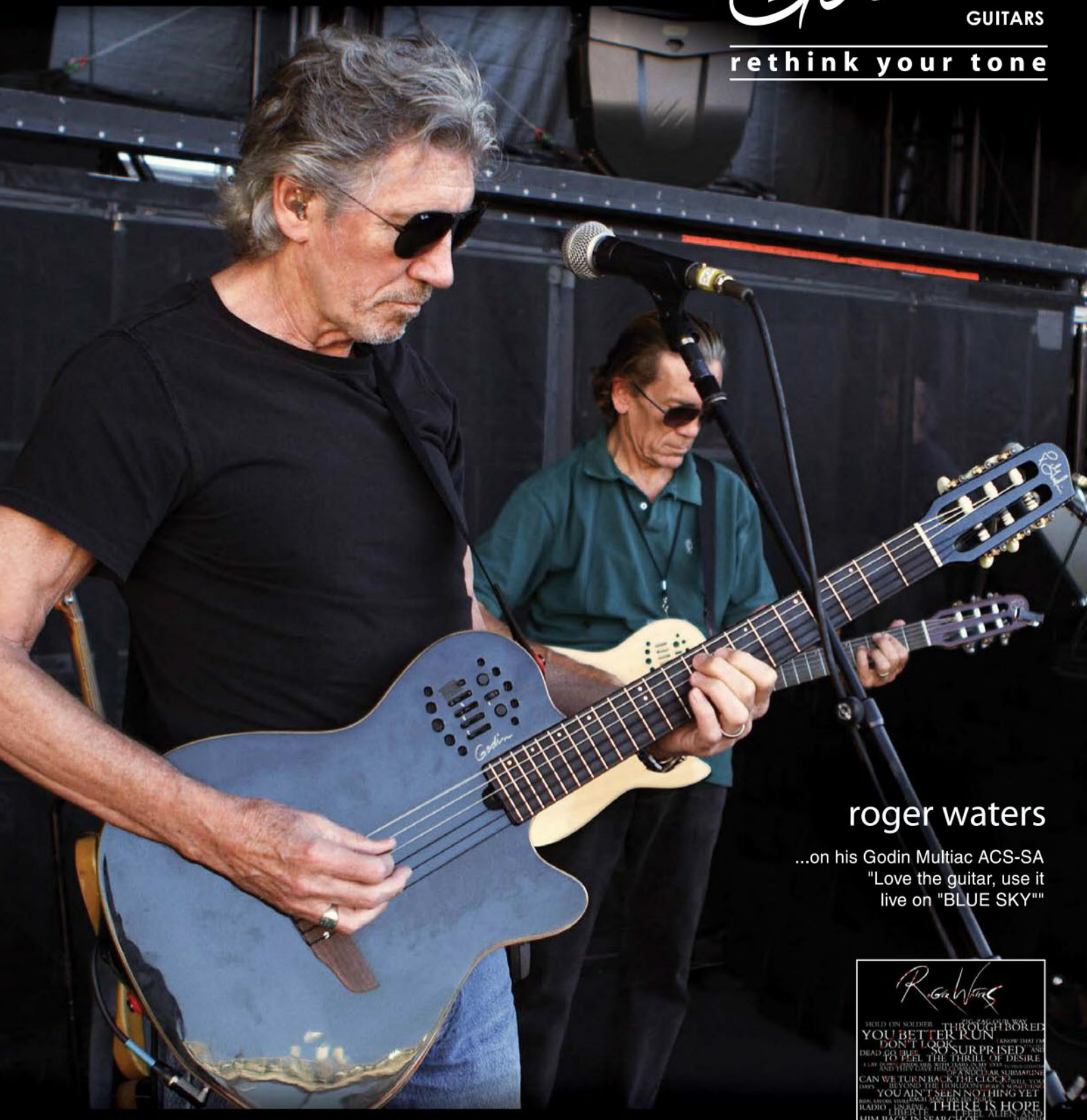

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Alvarez AG75CE & AP66SB

This pair of acoustics cover a wide spectrum of sounds at temptingly affordable prices. **RICK BATEY** gives them a strum...

Alvarez makes a whole bunch of different models, and the instruments we have for review this month fit two very popular niches: the UAPEAD (Universal All-Purpose Electro-Acoustic Device) is a role fulfilled neatly by the AG75CE, a good-sized solid-top cutaway electro with a well-equipped preamp. Meanwhile, the SLFP (Sweet Little Folkie Picker) is the current go-to breed of guitar for a swathe of singer-songwriters, especially when augmented with a soundhole magnetic pickup – a job the AP66SB looks to be cut out nicely for.

We'll begin with the larger one – the AG75CE, which is a Grand Auditorium from the Artist series, almost the same size as a dreadnought but tighter around the waist for better all-round balance, without too much bass. The top is solid western red cedar and the back and sides laminated rosewood; the neck is mahogany and the fingerboard is rosewood, with one abalone position marker at the 12th fret. You won't miss any position shifts, though, as there are black dots set into the cream neck binding. The solid headstock is rosewood-faced with the company's name and a double-A motif, both in pearl, while the sealed chromed kidney-button tuners have plastic pearl gear covers. Internally, it's clean, with no gluey squeeze-out under the hand-sanded, forward-shifted scalloped bracing; and outside the build is good, with only a slightly lumpy heel spoiling a largely well-finished instrument.

The AP66SB is a much smaller guitar, with a subtle, original and rather graceful parlour-style outline

The AG75CE arrived in fairly good playing shape, with perhaps a light glance at the nut and a millimetre or so needed off the saddle. The nut is very slightly wider than Alvarez instruments of a few years ago, though the bridge string spacing remains close at 52mm. With its almost Taylor-profile satin-finish neck, it feels like a guitar that's ready to go.

The AP66SB is a much smaller guitar, with a subtle, original and rather graceful parlour-style outline. With a slightly short 24-inch scale length and a 12th-fret neck join, it's designed very much as an intimate instrument rather than an out-and-out slogger. We reviewed a similar Alvarez in May 2012 – the AP70, which was sitka over laminated rosewood; this one has a laminated mahogany back and sides and a solid mahogany top – nicely grained, but with a bit of a dip in the upper treble bout, which shows against the light. We like the single-colour sunburst top – which gives a look not unlike those budget Harmonys of the 50s and 60s – with a pearl rosette and clean cream binding. Underneath the top, the X-bracing is again forward-shifted and scalloped to try to maximise the speaking area of the soundboard, and the all-important bridge plate is solid maple.

The neck is one piece, with a scarfed-on headstock and a stacked heel. It's quite chunky feeling, with a nut width >

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The AG75CE is up against such guitars as the **Tanglewood TWJ SFCE £389**, a super folk with solid cedar top, exotic back and sides and a Fishman Sonitone system. Or how about the **Taylor 114ce £717**, the big gun's most affordable Grand Auditorium, with a solid sitka top and the ES-T pickup system?

In the parlour zone, you have to try the **Faith FKM Naked Mercury** – a sweetie with a stripped-down aesthetic in solid mahogany and Engelmann, for **£399**. The **Simon & Patrick Trek Natural Acoustic SG £299** is a plain but good-sounding solid/laminate wild cherry number from a Canadian outfit that knows all about building top-value guitars.

of 45mm – or a shade under 1.75 inches, so there's plenty of room for the fretting hand, and the back is satin-finished. As with the AG75CE, the rosewood board has cream edge binding and that single stylised 12th-fret marker on the front.

The slotted headstock is a cool old-school touch – although, as anyone who has tried a quick string change will know, it directs this guitar more at the home than the stage (and even the Alvarez factory hasn't quite got the knack – the number of string turns around the posts varies between two and seven). The set-up on ours needs work: the saddle's a shade high and the nut is very high, making this AP66SB a bit awkward, even in the lower positions. Also, the nut gives the tuning some noticeable time-lag.

output-silencing tuner – as well as an output plate situated below the bottom strap button with a battery drawer, a 1/4-inch out and an XLR out. Obviously, this is a system for someone who understands how a sweepable notch filter works, but overall the tone controls are well-judged and usable.

The B-Band undersaddle film pickup sounds reasonably un-piezo like; although we found the system a touch noisy and hissy with the mids up flat, and also over-prominent in the trebles – especially the B string. Also, the onboard tuner is not super-accurate – even after a fresh battery; it's slow to recover neutrality when moving from one string to the next, and is sensitive to string attack. It'll get you through, but we think a really good modern clip-on will work better.

The AG75CE feels like a grown-up guitar – and sounds like one, too. It's open and ready to jump out of the gate

Both these guitars have bone saddles and nuts, as well as Alvarez's Bi-Level bridge, which places the pins on a lower level, guaranteeing a greater string break angle over the saddle than on a normal bridge. There's certainly a ton of break angle on both of these examples, and there's room for the saddles to come down a fair bit before the strings make contact with the lip of the upper shelf, so all is well.

In use

With its 1.75-inch nut and full-sized but comfortably waisted body, the AG75CE feels like a proper, grown-up guitar – and it sounds like one, too. It's open and ready to jump out of the starting gate in that typical cedar manner; and it's crisp, rich and slightly scooped in fine contemporary style, delivering really well for pretty much everything – heavy- or light-handed strumming, flatpick work or fingerpicking. Volume is promising, and there's a real almost dreadnought-like sonority and depth. It gets a big thumbs-up from us.

Quite a few off-the-shelf electros are going for the 'simplicity is best' approach to controls these days, but the AG75CE's has a B-Band SYS550 preamp with a full feature set – bass, middle, treble, presence, volume, a notch filter and a push-button

So to the AP66SB. Small-bodied guitars with mahogany tops and short scales are a tricky breed to manufacture, unless you've got the vast experience of a maker such as Martin, or the insane attention to detail of Collings, but those companies operate in far higher price brackets.

First impressions of the AP66SB are somewhat mixed; it's a little boxy, with hard, rather thin trebles and a bottom string that's none too strong, but after some playing time it begins to come together nicely. It is likeably open and immediate, and though you'd never call it sweet nor lyrical, it does have a certain bounce, a good element of deepness for its size and a sense of old-time honk. Forget about using it as a heavy-handed strumming guitar, but blues and country material work well, with a thumbpick really transforming the bottom end.

These Alvarez guitars cover very different fields. The AG75CE would be a great option for the value-conscious stage performer, as long as the B-Band system works for you. The AP66SB is more of a one-dimensional guitar, but it certainly is a handsome little picker for a very tempting price of £329; and with a good set-up it could be a lot of snappy fun to play in the home or the studio.

KEY FEATURES

Alvarez AG75CE

- **DESCRIPTION** Grand Auditorium electro-acoustic, made in China
- **PRICE** £499
- **BUILD** Solid western cedar top with laminated rosewood back and sides, cream ABS binding, mahogany neck, rosewood fingerboard, sealed tuners, abalone and MOP inlays, bone nut and saddle, B-Band SYS550 pickup system, twin strap buttons
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISH** Gloss w/ satin neck
- **SCALE LENGTH** 648mm/25.5"
- **NECK WIDTH** 44mm at nut, 53.5mm at 12th fret
- **DEPTH OF NECK** 21.5mm at first fret, 23mm at ninth fret
- **STRING SPACING** 37mm at nut, 52mm at bridge
- **ACTION AS SUPPLIED** 12th-fret treble 2.2mm, 12th-fret bass 3mm
- **WEIGHT** 2.13kg/4.68lbs
- **CONTACT** Blackstar Amplification 01604 817817
  alvarezguitars.com

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Capable all-rounder
+ Cedar gives bright, open tone
+ Comfy neck and string spacing
+ Well built and finished

– Simpler preamp might suit some
– Tuner not best in class

The AG75CE is a really good-sounding all-round guitar, and it's very competitively-priced, too; be sure to devote some time to auditioning the pickup system

8/10

KEY FEATURES

Alvarez AP66SB

- **DESCRIPTION** Parlour-sized acoustic, made in China
- **PRICE** £329
- **BUILD** Solid mahogany top with laminated mahogany back and sides, cream ABS binding, mahogany neck, rosewood fingerboard, open tuners on a slotted headstock, bone nut and saddle, two strap buttons
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISH** Gloss w/ satin neck
- **SCALE LENGTH** 610mm/24"
- **NECK WIDTH** 44.5mm at nut, 55mm at 12th fret
- **DEPTH OF NECK** 21.5mm at first fret, 24.5mm at seventh fret
- **STRING SPACING** 37.5mm at nut, 53mm at bridge
- **ACTION AS SUPPLIED** 12th-fret treble 3mm, 12th-fret bass 3.5mm
- **WEIGHT** 1.86kg/4lbs
- **CONTACT** Blackstar Amplification 01604 817817
  alvarezguitars.com

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Neatly updated parlour design
+ Good size for sofa noodling
+ Tempting price

– Slotted headstock appeal can wane
– Not ideal for dropped tunings
– You may prefer the sitka-top AP70

The AP66SB is a charming looker, which will suit some styles but not others; shop keenly and spend the savings on a pro set-up

6/10

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Orange Bax Bangeetar

The Bax Bangeetar may look like an overdrive pedal with extra knobs, but there's more to it than that. **HUW PRICE** takes it to the Bax...

KEY FEATURES

Orange Bax Bangeetar Guitar Pre-EQ

- **DESCRIPTION** Overdrive and distortion preamp with Baxandall tone stack, parametric midrange control, switchable 5dB boost and cabinet simulation. Battery/9V/12V power supply. Made in the UK
- **PRICE** £279
- **CONTROLS** mid, 'Q', freq, vol, top, bottom, gain, boost & bypass footswitch, level control
- **DIMENSIONS** 128x184x75mm
- **CONTACT** Orange Amps 0208 905 2828 **www.orangeamps.com**

The Bax Bangeetar is basically an Orange preamp in op-amp form, coupled with a studio-style equaliser in a sizeable stompbox enclosure. The equaliser section is the Bax Bangeetar's standout feature, and it inspires the name. Invented by Peter Baxandall, the Baxandall tone stack is an active equaliser with controls that operate independently.

Regular guitar amp tone stacks have interactive controls, and when set halfway up, you get a bass roll-off with midrange scoop. A Baxandall stack has a flat response at equivalent settings, and in active form there is no insertion loss. There's also the potential for bigger boosts and cuts in the mids.

Although Baxandall-style equalisers have featured in various guitar amps, the circuit is more commonly seen in hi-fi and pro audio gear. In some ways, this is odd because the midrange is where it all happens for electric guitar.

We all bang on about treble and bass, but a regular six-string tuned to concert pitch doesn't generate frequencies that qualify as 'bass' in the strictest sense. What's more, amp speakers cannot reach tweeter heights. Chug frequencies are actually pumped low mids, and cut is really upper-mids.

Consider how tweed and blackface-style Fenders differ, or how a Mesa/Boogie can be distinguished from a Marshall. Whether consciously or not, we assess guitar gear mostly by listening to the way it shapes the mids.

The gain range is huge. Judged solely on its merits as an overdrive/distortion, the Bangeetar is top drawer

Metal guitarists understand this better than most, but even so, the tone controls of most amps remain fairly rudimentary. By and large, you get three controls operating on three pre-set frequencies. Don't assume the absence of a mid control means the midrange frequencies are not being altered.

Having established how Baxandall tone stacks can be useful for guitarists, it's worth explaining why Orange's design guru, Adrian Emsley, has installed a parametric equaliser rather than a midrange boost/cut.

Studio engineers use parametics to fine-tune guitar sounds in a way not possible with regular amps. Studio parametrics provide boost and cut, but the best bit is the frequency is selectable rather than fixed. Higher-quality parametrics, such as the Bangeetar's, have 'Q' or 'bell width' controls to set the range of frequencies around the selected point the equaliser acts on. Parametric EQs are very powerful tone-sculpting tools that can be used for minor corrections or subtle enhancements. They can also perform precise boosts or cuts at carefully targeted frequency points. This can help you hear yourself in a dense mix, and create space for other instruments.

The Bangeetar's controls also include treble, bass, gain and volume. Two footswitches provide a 5dB boost and bypass. The Bangeetar is not a true bypass pedal, because Emsley has employed a high-quality buffer amplifier with a low-output impedance to drive long guitar cables and other effects. The cab sim out is voiced to emulate the sound of a mic'd up Orange 40th Anniversary PPC412 cabinet loaded with Celestion G12H 30s.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE... The **Palmer Root Effects Solid Metal £78.95** has a Baxandall tone stack and parametric EQ. The **DOD Boneshaker £159** has three bands of parametric EQ. The **Stone Deaf PDF-1 Parametric Distortion Filter £165** is a clean/distorted booster.

In use

To compare the flat-response Baxandall stack with a standard tone stack, I plugged into a blackface amp and matched on/off volume levels, setting the Bangeetar's volume high and gain low. The difference wasn't profound, but the Bangeetar fattens things up with the boost/cut controls centred.

This type of test doesn't reflect the way in which the Bangeetar is likely to be used, so I moved on to the overdrive. This is where you'll find the solid and harmonically loaded tones associated with Orange valve amps, but there was a fizzy and uneven quality to the tail end of the decay.

This is something I have noticed with even very high-quality op-amp overdrives and, for the Bangeetar, the simple fix is to bump up the supply to 12V. All my subsequent tests were performed at this higher voltage, where the Bangeetar felt more dynamically responsive and notes decayed smoothly.

The gain range is huge, moving from bluesy breakup to shred metal. Judged solely on its merits as an overdrive/distortion, the Bangeetar is top drawer, but its full scope becomes apparent only when you get onto the equaliser.

A quick way to familiarise yourself with a parametric is to select a narrow 'Q', apply a healthy boost and sweep through the frequencies. With high gain levels, you may notice an effect like plucking harmonics as you move your finger along a string, and the frequency control moves through the overtones.

Some frequencies will enhance the tone and may even help your guitar to drift into feedback with ease. Others may sound boxy or boomy. You can attenuate those frequencies to refine the tone. You may notice that attenuating at one frequency produces classic British rock tone, while another frequency will give more of a US vibe. You can also boost mid frequencies to mimic Mick Ronson's cocked wah sound. When you add the bass and treble shelving to the mix, the Bangeetar's tone-shaping power is formidable.

The cab sim out remains active regardless of the on/off status of the pedal. I tried recording direct through the Bangeetar and re-recording a DI'd guitar signal through the pedal. Both produced perfectly acceptable results at lower gain settings, but you must be careful with the input level when you're re-recording/re-amping because the Bangeetar can get a bit gritty when it gets too much signal.

The Bangeetar would be my automatic first choice for recording directly if I also had a decent modeller on hand, but it's exceptionally good as a distortion/lo-fi processor for vocals, bass and especially drums.

The boost feature doesn't provide much of a volume lift, but it does subtly beef up the tone, while also making it clearer. I'd be inclined to leave it switched on.

Guitar VERDICT

+ Outstanding tone-shaping ability
+ Very versatile
+ Sounds and feels amp-like
+ Cabinet simulation output
+ Can handle DI recording & re-amping

– Operates best with 12V supply
– Rail slightly obstructs footswitches

Much more than simply an Orange amp in a stompbox, the Bax Bangeetar is an ultra-versatile, tone-shaping tool

8/10

Orange Ade

The last pedals that Orange released were a sustainer and a phaser, but that was back in 1972 when Bax Bangeetar designer Adrian Emsley was wearing short trousers. We caught up with Ade for a quick chat.

What's the Bax Bangeetar all about?
"It's loosely based on the gain structure of our Rockerverb amp, but it's got a bit more gain, and the concept is to run that into something that's closer to a vintage mixing desk channel equaliser. Something like an old Neve with Baxandall top and bottom shelves and an active parametric midrange with a frequency sweep from 150Hz to 7.5KHz. So, if you're plugged into an amp with a frequency you're not liking, you can EQ that frequency out."

How are you achieving the clipping?
"It's all op-amps running at high impedance, like they would in an amp, and there are no clipping diodes. It's four stages of gain, just like using two 12AX7s."

Could you use it in the studio for processing drum loops and vocals?
"Yeah, you can hang them out of mixing desks because the headroom gives it that range. Voltages are bumped up internally, so everything is powered at plus/minus 9 volts or 12 volts, with 18 volts or 24 volts of headroom. 99 per cent of pedals run virtual ground, where you put 9 volts in but every stage is referenced to 4.5 volts, which halves the headroom. The Bax Bangeetar will drive anything in its path, and can even be plugged into an effects return."

Finally, are there any other Orange pedals in the pipeline?
"Possibly, but if I told you that, I'd have to kill you."

Can I quote you on that?
"Yeah, all I can say at the moment is, maybe NAMM 2016. The other thing is that these Bax Bangeetar pedals are on a limited run of 2,500, so grab one while you can."

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Strymon DIG Dual Digital Delay

Strymon's latest luxury stomper emulates the delays of the past, but not analogue ones. **RICHARD PURVIS** gets a repeat prescription...

We all know the accepted story: analogue delay is warm, wobbly and unpredictable, while digital delay is clear, crisp and just too perfect for rock 'n' roll. This is why some digital delay pedals are strangely coy about their own workings, and why many others make a great show of their analogue emulation tricks – using their modern processors to mimic the signal degradation caused by those flaky old bucket-brigade circuits.

So, then, what is actually going on here? The Strymon DIG is a digital delay that emulates... other digital delay units. The dry signal path is pure analogue, but everything else that comes out of this little pink box is 100 per cent digital and, for once, proud to wear its 24-bit heart on its sleeve. That might sound strange for a retro modelling unit, but there is some serious thinking involved: it's over 30 years now since the dawn of digital delay, and those early rackmount devices were pretty primitive by today's standards – primitive enough, Strymon reckons, to merit a revival.

There are three delay types on offer, accessible by a mini toggle switch at the top of the unit: 24/96 promises the purity of modern 24-bit/96kHz processing, ADM copies the percussive 'adaptive delta modulation' of the early 80s, and 12-bit goes for the slightly darker-toned delays of the mid-80s. The other mini switch allows you to add light or deep modulation to the repeats – this is the kind of atmospheric chorus effect made part of the delay landscape by the Electro-Harmonix Deluxe Memory Man.

Now then, as more observant readers may have spotted, there are no fewer than five other controls to twiddle here – the 'Dual' in the name means you can have two different repeat times running at once, just like a tape delay with multiple heads, and this is an important part of the DIG's sound. The two can be set for completely independent control, but the default mode has the second delay running at one of five subdivisions of the first one. Four of these are standard divisions, allowing for rhythmic layering effects, while the fifth is a 'golden ratio' that will, in theory, never land on the same beat as its parent; this setting is represented by a fractal-style squiggle, which is cute – though hardcore maths fans would surely have preferred a phi symbol. >

It's over 30 years now since the dawn of digital delay, and early rackmount devices were primitive enough, Strymon reckons, to warrant a revival

KEY FEATURES

Strymon DIG Dual Digital Delay

- **PRICE** £279
- **DESCRIPTION** Digital delay pedal, made in USA
- **CONTROLS** Time, mix, repeats, subdivision for second delay (triplet, eighth, 'golden ratio', dotted eighth, dotted quarter), mix for second delay; modulation switch (off, light, deep); delay type switch (24/96, ADM, 12-bit); tap time and bypass footswitches
- **FEATURES** 'Hidden' switching for true or buffered bypass, series/parallel/ping-pong routing, high/low filtering, tap tempo subdivision for delay 1, sync/free mode for delay 2, repeats for delay 2; mono input and mono/stereo outputs, plus expression pedal input; 9V power supply included (no battery power)
- **DIMENSIONS** 101 (w) x 120 (d) x 64mm (h)
- **CONTACT** MusicPsych, 020 7607 6005 **strymon.net**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
The original tape-driven **Roland Space Echo** was great for multi-tap delay textures, and you can simulate those effects with the more compact (and digital) **Boss RE-20 £195**. The **Electro-Harmonix Stereo Memory Man With Hazarai, £140 approx** lists multi-tap among its many clever features.

Each delay has its own mix control, and the repeats knob in the middle takes you from a single echo through to infinite feedback.

Add in the tap tempo footswitch and, controls-wise, that might seem to be about it... but no. The carnation pink chassis of this highly innovative unit is printed with the word DIG, and that's exactly what we need to do to fully understand this pedal – and deeper.

There are some very nifty secondary functions available, and they're all accessed by tweaking the controls while holding down both footswitches. You'll probably fall alseep, or go back to your knitting if we list all of them here (they're in the 'key features' panel for those of you who are interested), but two of them in particular really deserve to be highlighted.

The first of those functions is switchable true/buffered bypass – an especially useful trick for a delay, as some players insist on pure input-to-output bypass, but the buffered option allows delay trails to fade away naturally after the effect has been switched off – and the second is a two-way tone filter hidden inside the first mix control. Turned to the right, this engages a bass cut for lighter, more airy textures; to the left, it starts shaving off the top end for progressively darker repeats. Add in the modulation and things start to get very interesting – even, dare we say it, entering analogue-sounding territory?

In use

It's hard to know exactly where to start with such a heavily feature-packed unit, but we'd best kick off with just the one delay and add the second later. The time can be set anywhere from 20 milliseconds to 1.6 seconds, which should be a wide enough range for anyone's requirements, and leaves the most commonly used times somewhere around the middle of the dial. In pure 24/96 mode, with no modulation and no filtering, it sounds exactly as you'd expect it to: the repeats are clear and hi-fi, with very little background hiss. They can be short and slappy or long and loop-like; the basics of modern digital delay, in other words, are well covered. So, with the science part out of the way, now let's start messing things up...

All five subdivisions offer useful additions to the texture of the primary delay, with some interestingly jerky rhythms coming from the two dotted settings, but it's the golden ratio that stands out for its creative potential. Set the repeats to go on long enough and it doesn't sound like a simple multi-tap delay at all – it sounds like any number of delays and reverbs twirling around each other in a bewitching cosmic dance of love. Or something like that. The repeats can be maxed out for self-oscillation, but Strymon seems to have used some discreet limiting to make sure this doesn't get out of hand and destroy your amp and/or hearing. The modulation is nicely judged, with just a hint of sweet shimmer on the light setting and full-on Memory Man lushness on deep.

So let's have a look at these retro modelling tricks. At subtle settings, it has to be said that the differences between the three delay types are barely noticeable – there's maybe a hint of extra midrange attack in ADM mode, and a slightly softer edge in 12-bit. The distinctions do stand out more clearly once you crank the repeats knob, but this is not the real secret weapon of the DIG.

So, you're probably wondering, what is the secret weapon? The EQ filtering. Maxed out to the right, this scoops more and more body out of the repeats until you're left with something strangely brittle and otherworldly; turning the control a few degrees to the left of centre results in convincing analogue-style muffling, while the deep textures available right at the bottom of this dial are something to behold. You can continue playing clear, unfiltered guitar parts over the top and listen as they dissolve gradually into the rolling wash.

All five subdivisions offer useful additions to the texture of the primary delay, but it's the golden ratio that stands out for its creative potential

Planning to create some ambient electronica to soundtrack a film about the mysterious world of the jellyfish? You might not need a synth after all.

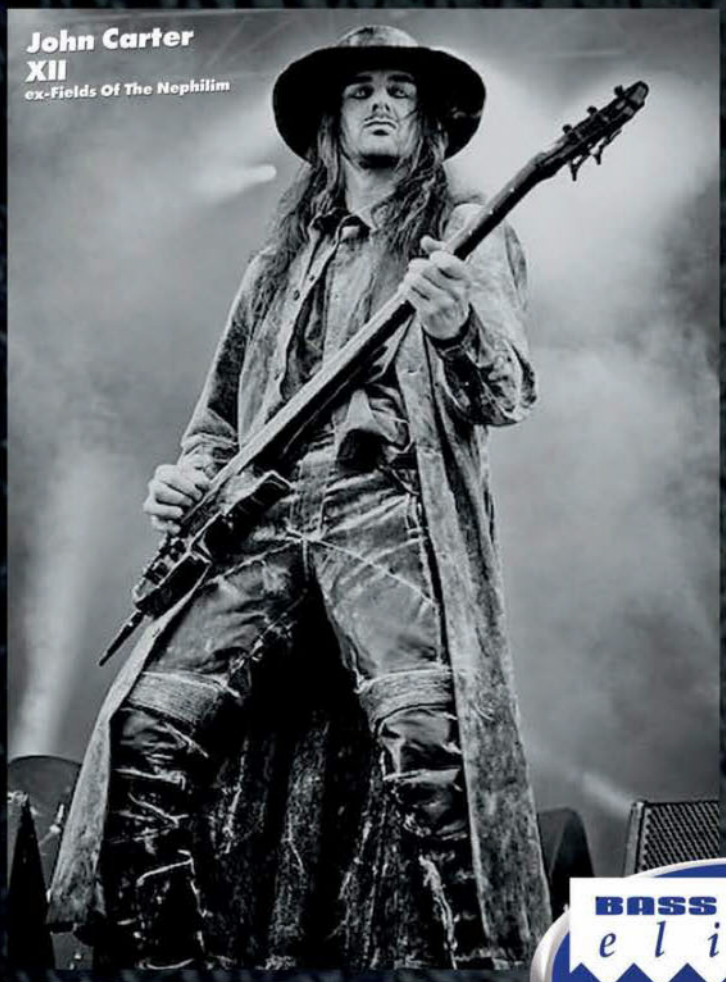
Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Complete multi-tap flexibility
+ Delivers pristine audio quality with low noise
+ Filtering enables you to create amazing ambient effects

– Pricey for a one-effect pedal, albeit a very high-quality, fully-featured one
– The three delay types aren't that distinct

Versatile and unique, the DIG proves that you don't need faux-analogue wobbliness in order to create musical delay effects with bags of character

8/10



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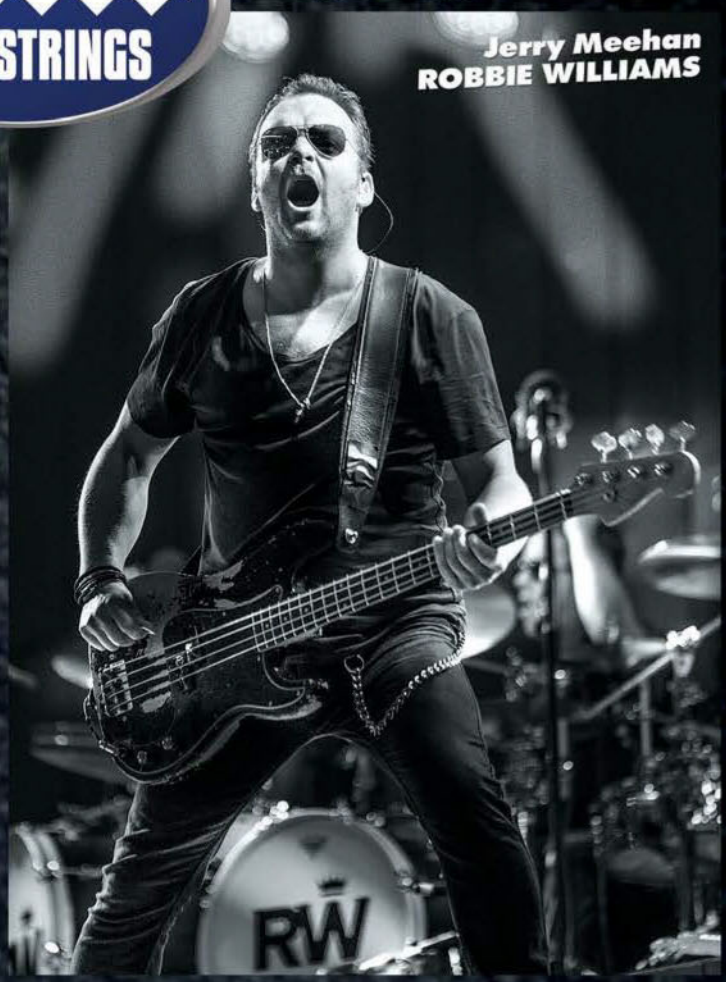

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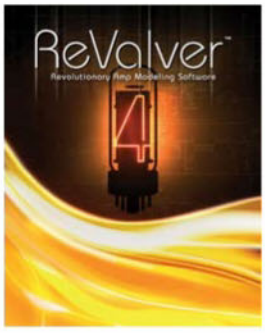

Peavey ReValver 4 Producer Pack

Peavey's already popular and powerful amp modelling software gets a redesign for this latest release. **MARCUS LEADLEY** gets reacquainted...

KEY FEATURES

Peavey ReValver 4 Producer Pack

- **DESCRIPTION** Guitar and bass amp modelling software bundle with 18 amp modules, 3 cabinet modules, input and output mixers, stomp box and rack style effects and Audio Cloning Technology. Noisegate, tuner and audio stream splitter. Functions as a standalone or as a DAW plug-in (AAX, VST, AU but not RTAS). Sample rates supported: 44.1 kHz – 96 kHz. 64 bit build.
- **PRICE** $99, additional modules available from the Peavey Amp Store: amp modules $7.99; stompboxes $3.99; effects/tools/RIR 2 $4.99; ACT Instrument Models $2.99; cabinet models $1.99; other bundles available at various prices.
- **TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS** Windows XP or later, VST 2.4/ AAX host, or sound card (preferably ASIO); CPU: 32/64-bit with SSE2; RAM: 2GB; Disk storage: 500MB. Mac OSX 10.7 (Intel CPU), VST 2.4/AU/AAX host, or sound card (CoreAudio); CPU: 32/64-bit with SSE2; RAM: 2GB; Disk storage: 500MB. Pro Tools users will require a 32/64-bit AAX-enabled version (10.3.5 or later). VST3 not supported.
- **CONTACT** Peavey +1 877732 8391 **revalver.peavey.com**

Peavey's approach to software amp modelling is unique; the company uses component modelling, so amps are broken down into their constituent parts: valves, capacitors, etc. Players can simply use the amps provided or edit the schematics – swapping valves and adjusting values.

While some of the graphics from previous versions remain, the ReValver 4 GUI has been redesigned. Amps and cabs, stompbox and rack effects each get their own page. While previous versions could be used in the live environment, there was a time lag when switching presets. This has been solved with the introduction of a new Gig mode, which allows you to pre-load up to eight presets and switch seamlessly.

The ReValver 4 software is free – the download comes with two amp models, a couple of stompbox effects, the Lite version of the new RIR 2 cabinet modelling module and a few other goodies. You can buy lots more modules from Peavey's Amp Store. Alternatively, there's the Producer Pack we're looking at here. For $99, you get 18 amps, numerous stompbox and rack effects, cabinet models and the full version of the RIR 2 cabinet modeller. Nine of the amps are Peaveys and the rest cover the usual suspects.

You can run two amps in parallel and mix or pan them in the Output Mixer. There's also an audio stream splitter module, a noise gate and a VST patcher for adding third-party effects to your arsenal. Stompbox effects are loaded onto a virtual pedalboard, which scrolls and grows as you add more units.

Working through the models reveals incredibly accurate-sounding amps that respond like their hardware equivalents

Post-amp effects can be dropped into the virtual rack. Another new feature is Audio Cloning Technology (ACT). On the input side, this 'listens' to your guitar as you play. You can then apply filters that make it sound like other instruments. ACT on the output side works like a mastering tool for final EQ shaping.

ReValver 4 can be used both as a standalone and as a plug-in (AAX, VST, AU) for your DAW. There are minimum system specs, so you will need to check out compatibility if you're using an older computer or legacy software.

In use

To maximise the functionality of the standalone version, you'll need an interface and a power amp and cab if you plan to go live. You will also need a USB device for the software licence to be locked to. Amp and cabinet modules appear on the page in front of you and it's easy to click, drop and change them. Having separate pages for amps and effects is good, as it cuts down on scrolling. Everything has virtual knobs, so making adjustments is very intuitive. Working through the models reveals accurate-sounding amps that respond like their hardware equivalents. Presets showcase everything from ragged blues to monstrous rock, and with the RIR 2 module, you can select cabinets, mics, polar patterns and mic positions.

Editing the amp schematics is quite addictive; for those without technical know-how, there are basic things to try, such as changing power stage valves for more or less grunt. As this is software, you can't blow anything up, so why not experiment? The input stage ACT is a lot of fun, too, allowing you to modify your guitar sound in all sorts of surprisingly realistic ways.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE... Line 6 has Standard **$90** and Platinum **$199** versions of **Pod Farm 2.5**, IK Multimedia has **AmpliTube 3 $69.99**. There's also **Overloud's TH2 $149**, Softube's **Vintage Amp Room $219**, Waves' **GTR 3 $175** and Native Instruments' **Guitar Rig 5 Pro £169**.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Authentic guitar amp tones
+ New graphic user interface
+ Highly editable
+ Requires investment in computers and hardware peripherals
+ You'll still need a power amp and cab to go live

ReValver 4 sounds great, and it's easy to use. Under the hood, there's massive sound-shaping potential. It works well in the studio and in the live situation, too

8/10

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House Of Tone House Special S Type 1960 pickups

Guitar & Bass AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Matthew Bascetta went from building violins and acoustic guitars to winding pickups, but he feels pickup winding and acoustic instrument voicing are closely related. **HUW PRICE** discovers why...

KEY FEATURES

House Of Tone House Special S Type 1960 Set

- **PRICE** £155
- **DESCRIPTION** Hand-wound vintage Strat-style pickups, made in the UK
- **SPECS** 42 AWG heavy formvar magnet wire, hand-beveled Alnico V magnets, vulcanised fibreboard flat work, lightly wax potted
- **CONTACT** House Of Tone Pickups 07791 691251 **houseoftonepickups.com**

Pickup winders can adjust numerous small parameters that may have small effects individually, but together have a huge impact on tone. House Of Tone's Matthew Bascetta equates the voicing of pickups to carving the braces of an acoustic guitar.

Building acoustic instruments taught Bascetta to listen and evaluate tone at a fine level and these skills were employed in extremis when developing the House Of Tone range with partners Nick Leech and Bob Grocott. The House Special S Type 1960 set was conceived as an 'idealised' 1960 Strat tone, based on readings taken from several genuine examples. Naturally, the ingredients include 42 AWG heavy formvar wire and hand-bevelled Alnico V magnets.

House Of Tone's calibration process involves making the neck and bridge units first, and then taking resistance and inductance readings to determine the exact specs for the middle pickup. Vintage-toned sets are lightly wax potted to retain some microphony.

Since orders are taken on an individual basis, House Of Tone will discuss a buyer's requirements and make sets to their specifications. If you want hotter windings or extra potting, simply email or phone to request it.

In use

Clarity was the first thing that hit me about this set. Without being brash or edgy, these pickups have a wide-open presence that's seldom heard in modern sets. This airiness is balanced by a thick and woody midrange that lends power to chords and a vowel-like quality to single notes.

There are five very distinct tones. Try hammering on and off between two notes on the D string and move the selector switch back and forth rapidly and you'll hear an effect not unlike moving a wah pedal. Not all Strat sets do this – unless you roll back the middle tone control. Strat bridge pickups always seem to be the hardest to get right; the HSST 60 bridge pickup sounds full, chimey and balanced, the wound strings have a springy 'boing' in the lower registers and there's a pleasing hint of quack through the midrange.

Without being brash or edgy, these pickups have a wide-open presence that's seldom heard in modern pickups

The middle pickup is the woodiest of the three, and the quack is still there. I liked it best for clangy R&B rhythm and picking sinewy lead lines. There is also a complex, almost delicate refinement in the treble that made me want to play close note clusters to hear how the harmonics blended. Surprisingly, the neck pickup is the brightest. Even so, its positioning contributes to a big, bell-like tone. Despite the fatness, note separation is excellent with no clarity lost. For soloing, it has an eerie singing quality with superb pick articulation and full-bodied follow-through.

Both in-between positions are hum-cancelling and sound quintessentially 'Strat'. Midrange scoop accentuates the hollow woodiness, and a slight compression of the transient attack makes both settings perfect for funk, blues and gentle chord melodies.

The vintage Strats I have enjoyed playing most all exhibited slight microphony, an airy and almost acoustic treble, full but clear mids and focused bass. The HSST 60 set ticks all these boxes, and more than holds its own with the real thing. Special by name and special by nature indeed.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Exceptional tone and clarity
+ Genuine vintage voicing
+ Bespoke service
+ Very competitively priced
+ Presented in a branded oak box

– Screws are not vintage correct
– Distressed finishes not yet available

We put the House Special S Type 1960 set up against a set of genuine '63s and couldn't honestly say the vintage ones sounded better

9/10

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE... The **Shed Vintage '54 set £180** comes with heavy formvar wire and Alnico III magnets. The **Monty's Retro Wind set £170** is wound with plain enamel wire. **Radioshop Pickups' Studio '57 Specials set £160** combines Alnico III and plain enamel wire.

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Elixir Nanoweb bass strings

Coated nickel-plated steel and stainless steel electric sets built to last

PRICE FROM £39.99 **CONTACT** www.elixirstrings.co.uk

To the cash-strapped bassist, the longevity of strings is a constant thorn in our musical sides. Which brand and gauge we equip our bass with is often based solely on economics, so anything costing substantially more than £15-20 has to offer and deliver solid justification. Elixir Strings, manufactured by WL Gore (famous for breathable, waterproof Gore-Tex fabric), is a good example, the major selling point of its premium-priced polymer-coated strings being longevity without loss of tone.

Elixir's coated strings first appeared in 1995, born out of research into developing an improved push-pull cable. Initial attempts using PTFE (plumber's tape) yielded protection but compromised tone, though after analysing the composition and qualities of a guitar string, followed by global road-testing of prototypes, Elixir developed the Polyweb and Nanoweb polymer coatings, where the whole string is coated to prevent build-up of gunk in the gaps between winds. Nanoweb is a thinner layer, with a 'new strings' feel and brighter tone; and Polyweb a thicker coating, with a 'played-in' feel and warmer tone. Most recently, boffins at Elixir have tweaked the Nanoweb coating and developed a version specifically for electric bass.

In use

If you can get close to your preferred gauge set, you won't notice anything radically different about the feel of Elixirs, and we mean this in the most positive sense. Those unfamiliar with coated strings can be reassured that the removal of direct contact between metal and flesh doesn't negatively impinge on the feel under the fingers. Tone-wise, the strings sound clean and bright, with unbiased midrange and well-realised lows. After a few gigs and hours spent practising and recording, with only a basic wipe-down afterwards, and without recourse to fancy cleaning products, neither the stainless steel nor the nickel sets showed any signs of tonal degradation when you would have reasonably expected it to have occurred, given the sweaty nature of gigs and the frequency of usage.

There are five sets of fairly logically organised gauges of nickel-plated strings, from super light to medium, and two standard five-string offerings. A selection of five tapered-at-the-ball-end and non-tapered B-strings provide opportunities for personalisation, a single .032 gauge C-string giving six-string players access to Elixir's wares. There's less variety in the stainless steel ranks, with three four- and two five-string sets and no single strings. **GM**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

Whilst undoubtedly more expensive than much of the competition, it's definitely worth taking a punt and checking the new Nanowebs out

8/10

Chowny Bass CHB-1

Affordable short-scale semi with retro stylings

PRICE £360 **CONTACT** www.chownybass.com

Chowny Bass is a new British brand that designs its instruments at its Bristol HQ and builds them in China. With an emphasis on value for money, Chowny's debut model – the CHB-1 – is an affordable semi-hollow design available in a choice of 10 flat or flamed maple finishes. Flat colours are £340, with a £10 upcharge for lefties. Flametop models are priced at £360 and £370. Hardcases are available for an extra £90.

Despite its entry-level pricing, the CHB-1 comes well equipped. The ES-335-style body has a flame maple top – our review model is finished in Tobacco Burst – while the ebony fretboard features neatly installed mother of pearl inlays, locking tuners and a bone nut. The neck profile is a slim C-shape that, combined with the instrument's short 31-inch/787mm scale, makes for a comfortable ride. The twin humbuckers are Artec Filter'Tron-style units, accompanied by traditional pairs of volume and tone controls. The three-way toggle pickup selector is situated on the lower horn. The Höfner-style floating rosewood bridge is an old-school affair, but seems more than stable enough to cope with the rigours of live performance.

In use

The CHB-1's feel is very player-friendly. It certainly won't intimidate guitarists making the jump to four strings in the way that a long-scale bass so often can, and full-time bassists will find it a breeze to execute the kind of runs and walking lines that are something of a stretch on a 34-inch scale neck. Though it comes supplied with roundwound D'Addario strings, we'd be tempted to string it with flat or tape wounds for a more authentic beat boom sound and experience. The instrument is a little neck-heavy when strapped on, but not excessively so.

Plugged in, don't expect the immediacy, punch and authority of a P-Bass; it takes a while to find the sweet spot, although there's a pleasing retro woodiness. Despite appearances, the tonality is closer to a Violin Bass than a Gibson EB-2, though there's a massive, dubby low end on tap should you desire it. One of the CHB-1's early adopters has racked up an enormous number of views on YouTube, playing slap on his Sunburst model, so don't assume that retro looks always equate to stylistic limitations; search for Davie504 on YouTube to check it out.

Further down the line, you might want to upgrade the pickups for serious gigging, but as an affordable, easy-to-handle bass for beginners, or for guitarists looking to branch out, the CHB-1 comes highly recommended. **CV**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

Chowny's debut in the bass market offers excellent value for money, smart looks and easy playability. Look out for a long-scale model in 2016

8/10

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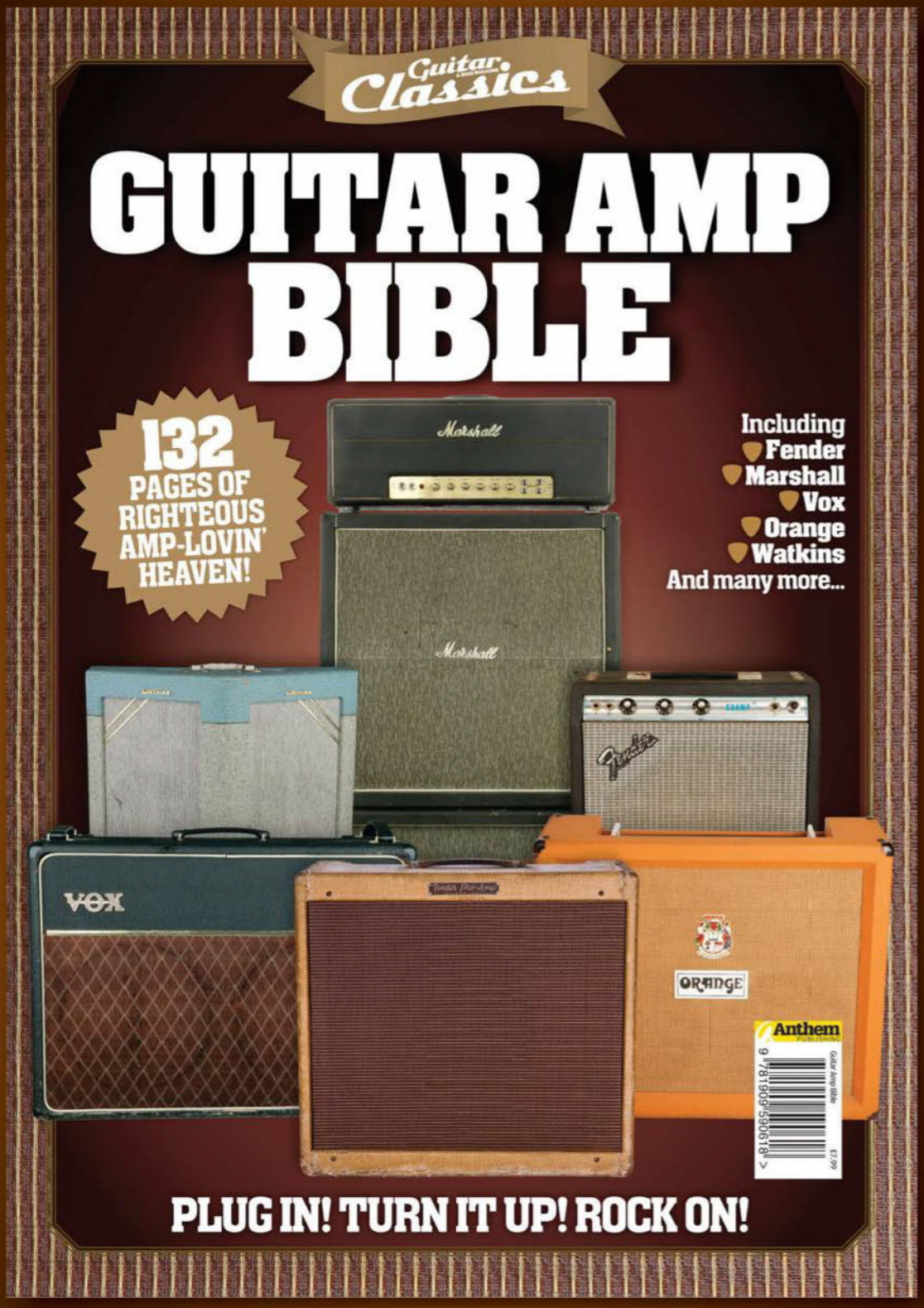

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So you've put that pedalboard together, now you need an amplifier that plays nice with stompboxes...

Fender Hot Rod DeVille ML 212

PRICE £849 **CONTACT** www.fender.com

Reviewed in depth on page 64 of this very issue of *G&B*, this latest take on the popular Hot Rod DeVille from Fender is an altogether more sophisticated proposition, designed in conjunction with LA session ace Michael Landau. Instead of channel switching or a master volume, you get a pair of footswitchable volume settings on a single channel designed to act as the ultimate canvas for effects. If you are a Strat player who demands headroom and gets kicks from stompboxes, unless you are determined to spend serious money on a boutique amplifier this is hard to beat.

If you are a Strat player who gets your kicks from stompboxes, the ML is hard to beat

Hiwatt DR201

PRICE £Various **CONTACT** www.hiwatt.co.uk

Clean headroom, you say? Introduced in 1970, the original Hiwatt DR201 is equally at home with guitars or basses, and was available with either six EL34 or a quartet of KT88 valves. Both vintage and current production models are rare beasts these days, but if you do manage to track one down, you'll find that there's little on the market to rival these monsters in terms of power and volume. Hiwatts are often described as the ultimate pedal-platform amplifiers; unless your regular gig is headlining the Pyramid Stage at Glastonbury, you'll probably be able to 'make do' with either the 100-watt DR103 or the 50-watt DR-504.

Victory V40H The Duchess

PRICE £829 **CONTACT** www.andertons.co.uk

Built in the UK and designed by renowned amp guru Martin Kidd, you might have seen Victory Amps on stage with artists as varied as James Bay and Guthrie Govan. The single-channel V40 offers plenty of clean headroom, thanks to a front end designed to take high-output overdrive, distortion and boost pedals. However, as a very touch-sensitive amp, it's also possible to push that front end into myriad drive textures, giving you access to a raft of compression and sustain characteristics from stompboxes. There's also a series effects loop with a hard bypass.

>

Morgan SW22R

PRICE £1,999 **CONTACT** www.peachguitars.com

Every Morgan Amplification design that we've played has been monstrously good, and the SW22R is no exception. Designed to squeeze as much headroom and volume out of a pair of 6V6 valves as possible, imagine you own an original blackface Deluxe Reverb and you've taken it to the workshop of a certain Mr Dumble for a service, and you'll be in the right ballpark. Derived from the SW50, Joe Morgan's update on the Dumble Steel-String Singer, the SW22R is a 22-watt version that retains its bigger brother's SRV/John Mayer-style magic.

Peavey Delta Blues

PRICE £960 **CONTACT** www.bandm.co.uk

Available in 2x10 and 1x15 combo configurations, the Delta Blues has classic styling, onboard spring reverb and tremolo, and delivers 30 watts that are loud enough for most modern gigging situations. Best results are achieved by using the clean channel as a basis for drive pedals; if you prefer a more compact format, then check out the Classic 20 Mini Head. Launched earlier this year, the Mini Head lacks tremolo, but is switchable between one, five and 20 watts, allowing you to tune its power amp response to your drive pedals and the volume and headroom the playing situation requires.

The M12 has beautiful chiming clean tones in abundance, and when breakup arrives it's overdrive and boost pedal-friendly

Dr Z M12

PRICE £1,099 **CONTACT** www.peachguitars.com

Clean headroom and 12-watt EL84 power stages don't usually go hand in hand, but the Dr Z M12 was designed with an EF86 front end that just loves pedals. The M12 has beautiful chiming clean tones in abundance, and when breakup arrives it's articulate, dynamic and still overdrive and boost pedal-friendly. Like all Dr Z amps, the M12's internals are beautifully handwired, yet its pricing represents excellent value for a US boutique amplifier. Pair it with a 2x12 cabinet and you might be surprised just how loud a dozen watts can sound...

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Opposite page, top, **Gretsch Tennessean (left) and 1960 6125 Anniversary**
Bottom, left to right, **Danelectro DC 59 Blue Sparkle (left) and Eastwood Sidejack Baritone; early-60s Framus Star Bass (left) and Gibson EB-2; Gretsch Silver Jet (left) and Gretsch Chet Atkins**

Vintage PRIVATE COLLECTION

MERSEY PARADISE

During the late 80s, Liverpudlian Paul Hemmings enjoyed spells in The La's, and later The Lightning Seeds. **LARS MULLEN** gets a tour of his guitar collection

"This was a very creative period," recalls Liverpool-born former The La's and The Lightning Seeds guitarist Paul Hemmings. "My mainstay guitar and sound for a long time was the jangle of this Gretsch Tennessean, which didn't leave my side. I used it extensively in The La's, having purchased it from John Robb from The Membranes in the mid-80s.

"I was at college at the time, so thankfully he agreed to £50 instalments. I particularly wanted a big-bodied semi and a Bigsby vibrato, which I love and still use a lot.

"I particularly wanted a big-bodied semi and a Bigsby vibrato, which I love and still use a lot"

"The La's' singer/songwriter, Lee Mavers, had a 1960 Anniversary 6125 Gretsch. It was so bashed he called it 'The Grotsch'. The previous owner had cut a gaping hole in the top to fit a pickup, which was held in with blue insulation tape. Both our guitars had the old machineheads, which slipped badly during those hot, sweaty early club gigs. You can hear us taking ages to retune on some of the live recordings.

"I eventually acquired Lee's guitar and decided I had no other option but to have it restored, as it was in such a bad condition.

"So here's The Grotsch today after an amazing rebuild by KGB Music in Birkenhead, Liverpool, now fitted with the correct pickup and two-tone green finish.

"KGB did such a good job, I use them all the time for all my guitar work. This is a fantastic-sounding jazz guitar; I also used it when I was in The Onset with Mike Badger, who founded The La's, and then in The Lightning Seeds for the video of the song *Perfect*. Mike Badger and I own The Viper – a record label, which we started in '99. It keeps me energised and challenges me to play in different ways. I actually bought this Gretsch Chet Atkins for its Filter'Tron pickups and its Eddie Cochran looks. It just has that wonderfully authentic 50s rock 'n' roll, 60s Buffalo Springfield sound.

"I also have this solid-bodied Gretsch Silver Jet from the Jet Series, which I use a lot. I've been using this guitar in the studio with Tommy Scott from the Liverpool band Space, working on an album due for release in 2016. The body is akin to a Les Paul. I've always loved that shape, but I've found I can't get on with many Les Pauls because of the weight and the thicker, muddy humbucker sound. >

Bigsby

Fender - Deluxe

Fender - Delu

"So the Silver Jet, loaded with a pair of DynaSonic single coils, ticked all the boxes, until I bought this Gibson '56 reissue Goldtop with a pair of P-90s. The specifications are the same as 60 years ago. The bottom line is that they are clear and chimey played clean and great when used with overdrive. I love the sonics, the higher single-coil permutations of the pickups are perfect, and the weight is bearable – and, of course, I fitted a Bigsby. I love this guitar.

"Here's a worn 60s SG Special, also with a pair of P-90s. I'm not too precious about throwing this one around, as it's already been to hell and back. This reissue Gibson Melody Maker has the same vibe; it's quite modern, but with a convincing aged finish and authentic vintage neck. It plays and feels like an old one – great for slide and those Johnny Thunders-type sounds.

"Back in the early days, Tommy Scott and I somehow acquired a small PA system, which we hawked around every music shop around Liverpool to get rid of. The very last one said he'd trade it for a mid-80s Tokai S-type hanging on the wall.

"Neither Tommy nor I wanted an S-type, but we'd had enough of carrying the PA around, so we did the deal. I'd previously tried some Strats when The La's got a record deal, but wasn't that impressed, but I loved this Tokai, and used it many a time in The La's and The Lightning Seeds. I've since installed a beefy Seymour Duncan Hot Rails in the bridge position for a little extra output, and Graph Tech String Saver saddles. Unlike a Bigsby, I seem to have tuning problems with Fender vibratos, so I get KGB Music to set them up without any movement.

"The Silver Jet ticked all the boxes, until I bought this Gibson '56 reissue Goldtop with a pair of P-90s"

"I originally bought this short-scale Squier Duo-Sonic for my son. He's played it a little, but I'd like to say it's mine now," Paul laughs. "Well at least ours, as I'm using it a lot. I love the classic no-nonsense vibe about it. It's hard to fault this guitar for the price. It's lightweight, but there's plenty of resonance going on from the simple bridge. The same unit is on this Fender Musicmaster, which is similar in design and another legendary Fender from the 70s, and refinished in what I would describe as a Shadows Orange. I call these two my TV guitars, as they easily fit into your body whilst watching TV. I'd pitch these somewhere between a Strat and a Tele.

"I used to have several Mexican and Japanese Telecasters, but I decided to trade most of them for a really good vintage model. It took a while to >

Opposite page, top, left to right, **Gibson '56 reissue Les Paul Goldtop (left) and worn 60s SG Special; reissue Gibson Melody Maker (left) and 1970s lawsuit Les Paul copy**
Bottom, left to right **Mid-80s Tokai S-type and 70s sunburst Fender hardtail, maple fingerboard Strat; short-scale Squier Duo-Sonic (left) and Fender Musicmaster**
This page, left to right, **Detail of Eastwood Sidejack Baritone; 1961 Olympic White Telecaster with rosewood fingerboard; early-70s Gibson ES-335**

find the one for me, ending up with this Olympic White model with a rosewood fingerboard, dating from '61. This guitar squashes any previous doubts I had about pre-CBS Fenders sounding better than modern ones. It must be an age thing within the woods and the electrics. It's not a myth – financially, I wish it was. This is a magical guitar."

Next up, Paul produces what we initially think is a Les Paul – until we look a little closer.

"Ha, well it's a copy," he admits, "probably a Columbus or Avon from the 70s. I included it here, as it was my first guitar, which cost just fifteen quid from a junk shop – complete with free 'Gibson' headstock sticker. It was in a bad shape, and someone had carved 'Status Quo' in the back of the body. I almost sold it recently, but my wife discouraged me. I'm glad, as this guitar holds a lot of personal memories.

"As a youngster, I thrashed away to records my mum used to play. I owe all my musical influences and aspirations to her. Classic cuts by The Beatles, The Beach Boys, Ike and Tina Turner and The Rolling Stones. I didn't know what kind of guitar Keith Richards used, but it sounded incredible. I was very influenced by his melodic, rhythmic style of playing. I also enjoyed the punk movement – *New Rose*, the first single by The Damned, I thought was fantastic, amongst the many other wonderful songs from that era.

"I'm a fan of well-constructed songs. The guitar part is there to help the song along, whether it be a short catchy riff or a solo, both need to be tasteful. As a kid, my first concerts were Black Sabbath, AC/DC with Bon Scott, and Motörhead – all guitar-driven bands that weren't self-indulgent like many from the 70s. I think punk sorted most of the rest out."

"I have several acoustics. My '68 Gibson Dove is battered but still one of the best acoustics I've played"

As with most guitar gatherers, there are always a couple of acoustic favourites in the pile.

"I have several acoustics here. My '68 Gibson Dove is battered and bruised now, but is still one of the best acoustics I've ever played, and like this 19-fret Gibson LG-1, is perfect for constructing songs. A previous owner had neatly installed a pickup at the end of the fingerboard, which sounds really sweet.

"I used the Dove to co-write the theme music for the BBC drama series called *Doctors*, for which I was nominated for the Ivor Novello Award, so I was quite pleased about that.

"I'd like a really nice vintage resonator, although I'm a little hesitant, as I've heard the necks can >

Above, left to right, **1968 Gibson Dove (left) and Gibson LG-1; Modern resonator copy (left) and 1930s Regal wooden-bodied parlour resonator; 70s Japanese nylon-strung classical acoustic**

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Above, left to right, **Regal 1930s resonator headstock; probable 1800s parlour guitar, bought from eBay for £100; unknown model guitar built in Czechoslovakia**

be a bit iffy. This modern copy works well fitted with a bug, and I must have been lucky with this wooden-bodied, parlour model built by Regal during the 1930s, fitted with a Dobro resonator. It has a warmer sound, of course, and luckily the neck remains accurate and straight. I bought this one from the proceeds of selling off antiques that my uncle and aunt had in their cellar. As well as being an actor, he used to work on London's Portobello Road, so there were some interesting items tucked away. Every time I play this one, I think of them. They were both real characters and special.

"I've been lucky finding some of these gems, although this little parlour beats them all hands down. You hear the stories about how a guy might try 10 Strats in a shop before he finds the right one.

"I've played several parlour guitars over the years, and they've always been a bit hit and miss, especially within the intonation. I can play a full barre chord up on the 10th fret on this one and it's perfectly balanced and in tune.

"I can't see a visible brand or date, but I suspect it's from around the late 1800s, probably built in the USA by an immigrant – the workmanship is amazing. This was an eBay purchase, which I bought for just £100, complete with original coffin case. I was hanging around Barcelona the day after a gig and saw this Czechoslovakian guitar in the window of a guitar shop. I've trawled the net, but can't track down a model or name for this one either. I would say it's from the 60s, judging by the Formica, and was originally complete with a plug-in mini amp attached to the body – sadly that's long gone. It certainly has character... bit of a Rickenbacker jangle going on as well.

"I've been lucky finding some of these gems, although this little parlour beats them all hands down"

"Some of my guitars have certainly seen a lot of smoky clubs, and been knocked about over the years. But as long as they play well, I'm not that bothered what they look like. They all have to sonically offer me something different, because ultimately they are bits of wood and tools of the trade at the end of the day."

For more information on Paul Hemmings, visit www.the-viper-label.co.uk

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ABSOLUTE BEGINNERS

In part two of the British-built solidbody electric story, **PAUL DAY** documents the golden era enjoyed by UK companies during the early 1960s

Photographs **Lars Mullen**

Last month's article looked at the small selection of solidbody electrics built in Britain during the late 50s, but the amount of choice increased considerably when the guitar group boom began in earnest in 1960, as more UK companies realised that plenty of money could be made by catering for those players who preferred air-less instruments.

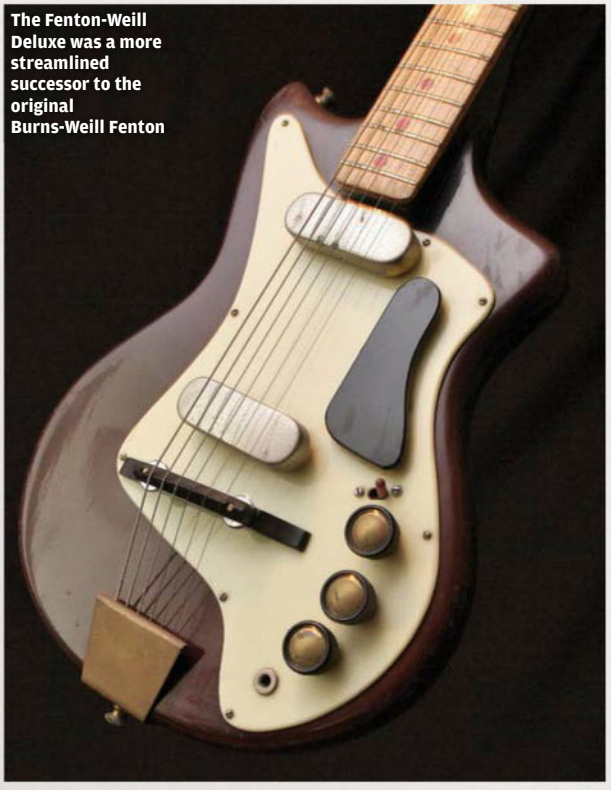
As in part one, much of the dating confirmation comes from advertising employed in the relevant back issues of major music weekly, the *Melody Maker*. The resulting chronology can contradict 'facts' found on the internet, but the accuracy of printed info from the era is very difficult to deny.

1960: Moving with the times

Burns swiftly made several modifications to the Short Scale De-Luxe Artistes six-string, launched in late '59. These included a groundbreaking 24-fret count, and the model name was abbreviated to merely 'Artist' – but before too long that would change again. During 1959, Shadows lead guitarist Hank Marvin had swapped his inexpensive Antoria for one of the first Fender Strats to arrive in Britain, and his subsequent innovative use of vibrato arm and echo unit soon saw countless players keen to copy this all-new combination. Burns quickly came up with a suitably mobile tailpiece, and in May 1960 the Artist assumed the appropriate Vibra Artist title. It was joined by the similarly styled Artist bass, while November brought less costly companions: the smaller-bodied Sonic six- and four-strings, which became firm favourites with many groups.

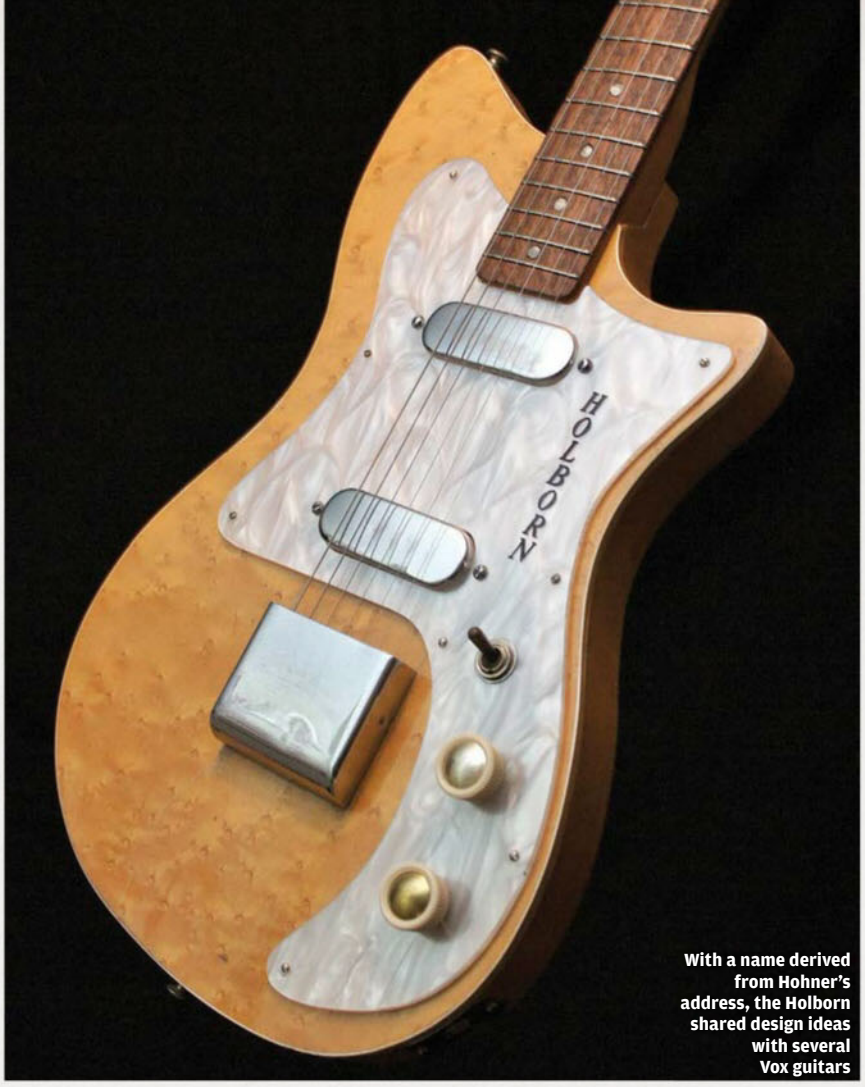
Dallas duly introduced the Rangemaster vibrato unit and featured this on two angular-bodied solids of the same name, one being a decidedly avant-garde double-neck. Grimshaw also moved with the times, adding a vibrato to the Meteor SS early in the year, but for much of 1960 most British brands still had firmly fixed ideas.

These included Fenton-Weill, the logo adopted by Henry Weill when he decided to continue instrument production, despite Jim Burns' sudden departure. Although the brand name changed from Burns-Weill, the range initially stayed much the same, but styling would soon become more >



The Fenton-Weill Deluxe was a more streamlined successor to the original Burns-Weill Fenton

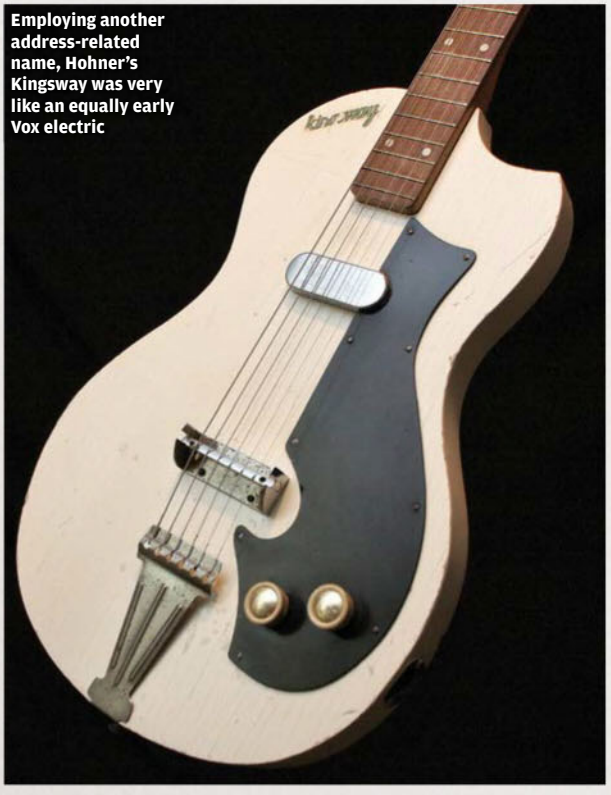
In May 1960, the Burns Artist became the Vibra Artist via the addition of an own-design vibrato unit



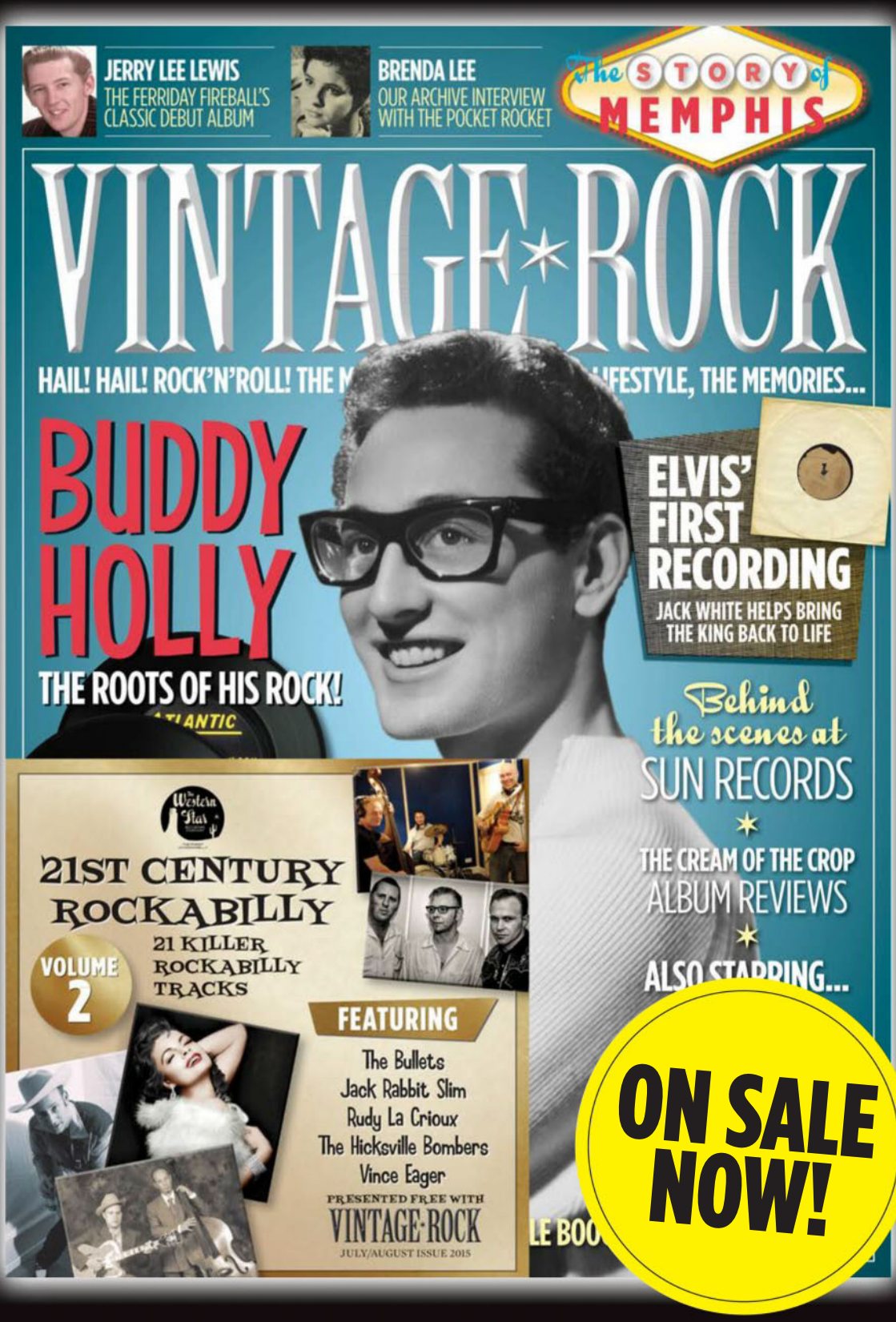
With a name derived from Hohner's address, the Holborn shared design ideas with several Vox guitars

streamlined. The company built the Broadway 1857 two-pickup bass for distributor Rose Morris, while single-cutaway, six-string electrics also debuted under this in-house banner, with design, quality and price tags comparable to those of the already successful Dallas Tuxedos.

Although best known for accordions and harmonicas, in August 1960 Hohner first hit the solid guitar road, via the Holborn and Kingsway. These instruments were quite similar to certain Vox models, which wasn't too surprising as they all came from the same UK factory. In the Vox range, the single-cutaway Stroller and Shadow partnered the Fender-like Soloist, Duotone and Ace – the >



Employing another address-related name, Hohner's Kingsway was very like an equally early Vox electric



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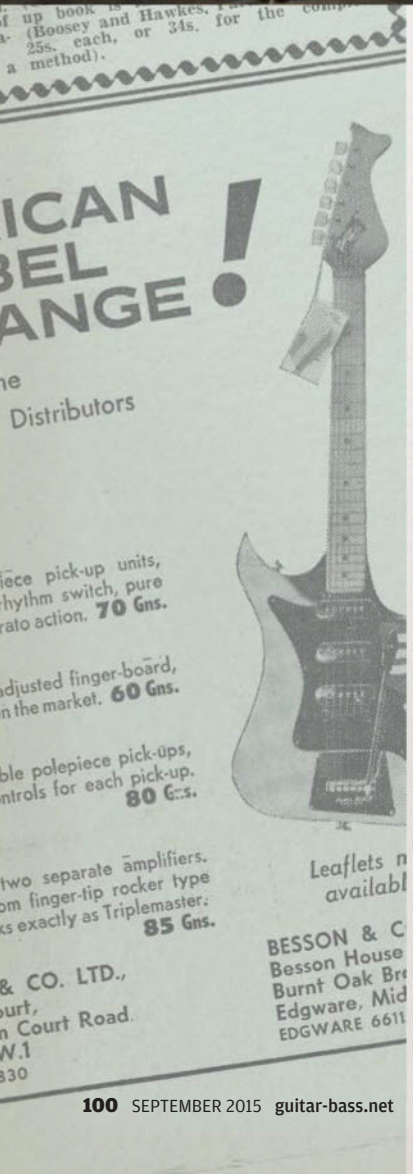
The Vox Stroller's body shape was borrowed from a Japanese-made Guyatone guitar



latter featuring a Vox vibrato unit. The Bassmaster was this brand's first four-string, while the flagship Escort and Consort guitars were noticeably more upmarket, likewise the twin-pickup Contour bass.

Watkins was another UK amplification company concentrating on cost-effective electrics. First advertised in July 1960, the Watkins Rapier and Rapier Deluxe solids sold for a modest £20 and £24 respectively, which bought one or two pickups, plus a single-cutaway shape borrowed from a 1950s US National.

By this time, British solidbody pioneer Supersound had re-commenced building guitars and basses, but with more advanced, double-cutaway styling. However, lacking Jim Burns' involvement, the revised results proved less player-friendly, and therefore didn't compare too well with the competition of the period.

Vox broke every rule in the design book with the decidedly non-curvy, coffin-shaped Phantoms

1961: Electric dreams

By now, groups were becoming 'beat' rather than 'rock', although the escalating demand for electric guitars didn't change. Thanks mainly to The Shadows, Fenders had become dream machines for most guitarists, but limited funds usually dictated more modestly priced preferences, and British brands enjoyed their fair share of this less-moneyed market. The Fenton-Weill catalogue continued to evolve via a vibrato tailpiece option, plus the three-pickup Triplemaster. Later solids included the export market Tux-Master and the American Label line, which first appeared in November 1961, featuring some fresh model names and revised design ideas.

The company was also kept busy making instruments marketed by various competitors. These included a second bass for Rose Morris: the small-bodied Broadway 1925; while the Amazon, Zambesi and Apache were Hohner-badged six-strings introduced in May 1960. These were styled like the brand's earlier Holborn, but the Ambasso bass strongly resembled Fenton-Weill's Deluxe four-string. Yet another customer was Dallas, whose Tuxedo Six was simply a re-titled American Label Twinmaster; and one version of the company's Solid Special also came from the Fenton-Weill factory.

Vox broke every rule in the design book with the decidedly non-curvy, coffin-shaped Phantoms. First advertised in October, these ultra-distinctive electrics were destined to become iconic 60s instruments. The Watkins range also expanded with three-pickup and vibrato-equipped versions of the earlier Rapier.

The single-cutaway shape was retained, but the original three-a-side headstock was subsequently replaced with a definitely Fender-type design. The latter also appeared on the Superline 66 solid, introduced in November and boasting a new >

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Supersound's DCB bass boasted new styling, but was less player-friendly than earlier examples

offset-cutaway body carrying an unusual looking scratchplate.

Burns had been comparatively quiet all year, but this changed dramatically when the Bison debuted in December. Featuring forward curving, exaggerated body horns, four pickups, gimmicky split-sound circuitry and a new, very complex vibrato system, this all-black beast cut an impressive figure, with a £157 price tag to match that easily made it the most expensive UK-made solid six-string.

1962: Seeing red

The Shadows had already determined which were the best guitars to be seen with, but once the film >

Marketed by Rose Morris, the Broadway 1925 bass proved a popular, wallet-friendly four-string

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In 1961, Watkins' Rapier Deluxe gained a Fender-flavoured headstock, three pickups and a vibrato

The Young Ones went on general release in early '62, the group's featured appearance in the film ensured that demand for a matching set of solids, preferably red and made by Fender, hit an all-time high. By this point, many guitar builders were giving their body shapes more obviously Fender-influenced outlines, while glued-neck construction was swiftly being superseded by the easier to produce and less expensive bolt-on alternative.

Watkins was quick to react, replacing the original Rapiers with the new double-cutaway 22 and 33 models, which respectively employed two and three single coils. Initially, these guitars still came with glued necks, and Watkins' rival manufacturer, Fenton-Weill, also continued to favour the latter method for a while, combining it in July 1962 with a curvy horned body on fashionably titled Twister equivalents of the American Label solids.

Early in 1962, Burns added Deluxe versions of the Vibra Artist and Artist bass, followed by a succession of brand new, bolt-neck solids. Guitarists could choose from the Vista Sonic, Split Sonic, Jazz and Jazz Split Sound, while bass players enjoyed an equivalent Vista Sonic, the novel Split Sound six-string, as well as a partner for the Bison. Late in the year, the latter guitar underwent some major amendments that included losing one pickup and gaining a bolt-on neck.

Many guitar builders were giving their body shapes more obviously Fender-influenced outlines

Vox also explored the six-string bass concept via the Cougar, but this specialised model lacked the mass-market appeal of new additions such as the Dominator and Super Ace, while the low-cost Clubman guitars and bass expanded the entry-level end of the company's catalogue.

Fresh inspiration

The Beatles' debut single was released in October 1962, and the ensuing significant changes in music, performance and instrument preference they inspired would soon become increasingly apparent. By 1966, American electrics completely dominated demand, and the heyday of the home-grown British electric was well and truly over, never to return.

Even so, after very basic beginnings in 1958, the following four years had seen British guitar makers match a rapidly expanding market to become a fully-fledged and thriving industry. That was due mostly to the few foward-thinking individuals from that fast-moving era, who often battled against the odds and economic uncertainty to successfully produce electric guitars and basses in this country. The importance of these people and their significant achievements should therefore never be forgotten, ignored or underrated.

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VINTAGE JUNK?

Don't throw away those seemingly worthless old stompboxes cluttering up the attic. As **SID BISHOP** explains, many 50s and 60s pedals have become highly collectable today...

SID BISHOP

During his tenure at the Top Gear store on London's iconic Denmark Street, Sid dealt with multitudes of famous musicians. Having been around, in his own words "before vintage guitars were invented", Sid got up close and personal with thousands of drool-worthy instruments. Luckily for us, he's willing to share his stories and wisdom about all things guitar-related.

Old effects pedals come on to the market frequently these days – mainly, I assume, as all of us old geezers are having a bit of a clear-out. They are becoming collectable in their own right and, if they are fortunate enough to avoid the local recycling centre or the skip, could fetch surprisingly large amounts of money.

Whizzing back in time to the late 40s and early 50s, amplifiers were very basic – just volume and tone controls were deemed to be sufficient for most at the time, although the technology was in its infancy and not much more was commonly available. Some amp makers were experimenting, even then, with built-in tremolo or vibrato effects, and one or two even with onboard reverb and echo – much desired by the country or Hawaiian groups of the period, this still being a pre-rock 'n' roll age.

By the end of the 1950s, guitarists were becoming aware of the distorted sound heard frequently on recordings made by leading rock 'n' roll or blues guitarists of the day, and wondered how it was done, but simply turning an amp's volume up to overload it – as Muddy, Chuck or Bo did – was not always a satisfactory solution. Some guitarists, however, discovered that sacrificing speakers by sticking dozens of drawing pins through the cones, then wrapping the whole lot up with sellotape, or even slashing them with a razor, would be one, albeit costly, way to achieve that sought-after, and trendy, 'fuzzy' tone. If, though, during a live set, you wished to return to a cleaner sound for a song or two, you'd be stuffed! Wouldn't it be great if you had some sort of switchable device that would give the desired result? The welcome invention of the foot pedal made such vandalism no longer necessary.

Effects pedals, or stompboxes as we often refer to them these days, only really became a viable proposition upon the invention of the transistor. Early attempts at building add-on effects units using valve-based technology, such as those made by DeArmond in the 50s, were primitive and unreliable, whereas transistors were lighter, took up less space, and (almost) never went wrong. The first example of a solid-state unit was Gibson's Maestro Fuzz-Tone, which appeared in 1962. I'm going to ignore spring reverbs and tape echo units, which had also been around since the 50s, but couldn't be described as footswitchable stompboxes.

Fuzz boxes were an instant sensation, and every guitarist quickly had to add one to their growing armoury of equipment. A number of companies, some of which already made amps or guitars, launched their own versions of the fuzz, Ampeg being one example. These were often hurriedly designed – and looked like it. They were usually formed from sheets of bent steel or aluminium, screwed together, decorated crudely with some lettering and powered by a PP3 battery that took around half an hour to get to. Size wasn't a

Photo courtesy Perry Freeman

consideration, and many early pedals took up a lot of floor space, so they were at least stable underfoot.

Years passed, and some clever people thought to themselves, 'So, if we can have a fuzz box, then why not a phaser, tremolo, flanger, chorus or octave divider?' Or even more weird stuff, such as ring modulators, for those who might have been a bit more 'on the edge'. In the fullness of time, all of these, and many more, became available. Records were released with those strange sounds on them that every player just had to have, especially during the psychedelic era, and I can recall seeing primitive versions of most of these by the late 60s. By the early 70s, more reliable and better-made examples were in the shops, with MXR and Electro-Harmonix the market leaders, and Maestro remaining a major player for many more years.

For lots of manufacturers, such as MXR and Dod, more substantial die-cast boxes became standard, rather than screwed-together tin ones. However, an original EHX Big Muff would be very collectable now, and the same could be said of the Japanese-made Uni-Vibe, primarily due to its association with Jimi Hendrix.

There were plenty of homegrown UK products, such as the Dallas Arbiter Fuzz Face – now reissued by Jim Dunlop, though original examples are much sought after – the Vox Tone Bender fuzz, a whole range of Coloursound pedals, and those sold under the Sola Sound brand, marketed by Macari's.

We can't forget, either, the eponymous Top Gear range, with its distinctive red and silver fascias, that were available from 1972. There were Japanese-made Univox and Guyatone units available, too, followed in later years by Ibanez and Roland/Boss; and the Germans and Italians got in on the act with the Hohner and Eko ranges respectively. Then, as now, no guitarist would consider their stage rig complete without a pedal or two. The pedal market today has exploded, and there many players who spend more money on their pedalboards than their guitars or amps.

The pedal market has exploded and many players spend more on their pedals than guitars or amps

The question, therefore, must be 'what should I collect?' Any early pedals from the 60s, and even 70s, could justifiably be said to be 'collectable', simply due to their age and rarity, and I've seen pristine examples on sale priced in the hundreds; though I also occasionally spot some at guitar shows priced much more moderately. Certain models are desirable because they produce a very specific 'classic' sound, and the nostalgia factor is sure to creep in. I know that there are people around who collect nothing other than classic effects units, and deal in them, too – possibly as an alternative to collecting guitars that have become prohibitively expensive. In my view, it's also a market that has potential for future growth, so if it's interesting, buy it – but please make sure it works, otherwise it's just a chunk of junk.

Above **The late 1960s and early 70s saw plenty of UK-built pedals arrive on the market, such as these Top Gear units, launched in 1972**

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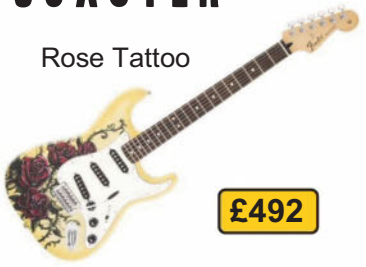

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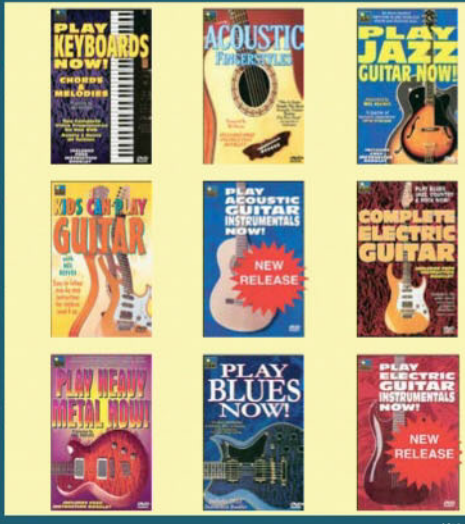

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How to... record electrics

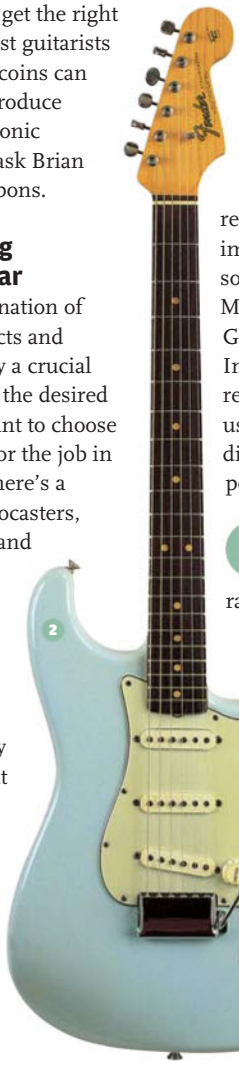
These days, there are more ways than ever to capture the sound of your electric guitar. **JOHN PICKFORD** shares 25 top recording tips in our bluffer's guide...

1 The basic sound

Electric guitars are capable of producing a multitude of different sounds, ranging from the purest cleans right through to saturated distortion and feedback. Many factors influence the final recorded sound; the type of guitar and amp, and any stompbox or rack-mounted effects used will shape the initial tone. The choice of microphone(s) and mic'ing techniques, too, along with any studio processing, will also contribute to the end result. Your playing style is also crucial; experiment by playing with fingers or a variety of plectrum gauges until you get the right attack. While most guitarists play with a pick, coins can also be used to produce interesting harmonic overtones – just ask Brian May or Billy Gibbons.

2 Choosing the guitar

While the combination of guitar, amp, effects and technique all play a crucial role in achieving the desired tone, it's important to choose the right guitar for the job in the first place. There's a reason why Stratocasters, Teles, Les Pauls and ES-335s have featured on so many classic recordings over the years; it's because they are as reliable as they are versatile. That said, don't be afraid to try guitars fitted with more esoteric pickups, such as Gold Foils, for a less generic sound. P-90s are another great studio weapon; less dense than humbuckers, they can provide plenty of rhythm raunch without crowding the mix.



3 Amplifier types

The amplifier you choose to use will have a huge impact on the sound. Valve amps are still king for most players, but they can often be impractical in home recording scenarios. Though we'd all love to mic up a cranked Marshall Plexi every time a classic-rock sound is required, these days software and hardware modelling is so good that the results are almost indistinguishable from the 'real thing' in a finished mix. Though pricey, the Kemper Profiling Amp and Fractal Audio Axe-Fx produce seriously realistic results, while almost as impressive are software solutions such as IK Multimedia's AmpliTube and Guitar Rig from Native Instruments. If you are recording on a Mac or iPad using GarageBand, don't discount the built-in amp and pedal simulations either.

4 Amplifier size

The size and power rating of the amp, as well as the size and type of the speakers within the cabinet, will have a significant impact on the recorded sound. Obviously, huge stacks will produce a very different sound from small combos. That said, many recording engineers have found that a small, low-powered amp cranked right up can sound more exciting than a big powerhouse. Even cheap transistor amps with tiny speakers can sound great in the right context. Don't be precious and don't rule anything out; it's all about the end result!

5 Listen

Before deciding on how to go about mic'ing the amp, listen to the sound in the room. If the guitar is being recorded as part of a rhythm track in the same room as drums and other instruments, the only option may be to use a close-mic'ing technique, unless you don't mind dealing with the other instruments bleeding into the guitar track. Recording guitars in isolation, as an overdub, presents more options for ambient room mic'ing. Experiment with mic positioning to achieve the right amount of room sound and the desired bass and treble response. Distance-mic'ing in a very live-sounding room can create an appealing slapback echo-type sound, while close mic'ing gives you absolute flexibility in the mix.

6 Basic mic'ing

For many engineers, a simple one-mic technique gives them all the recorded electric guitar sound they need. Dynamic types, such as the ubiquitous Shure SM57, are ideal for capturing loud sounds, as they can handle high SPLs. For a more accurate representation of the amplifier as the human ear hears it in the room, a condenser or ribbon mic can be employed, although care must be taken not to damage the mic with very loud

A small, low-powered amp cranked up can sound more exciting than a big powerhouse

signals. Pointing the mic at the centre of the speaker cone produces the brightest sound, with the sound becoming increasingly warm the further off-centre it's placed. It's common to position the mic quite close to the speaker grille, unless a degree of room sound is desired. A good starting point is to place the mic just off-centre, at a distance of between two and six inches.

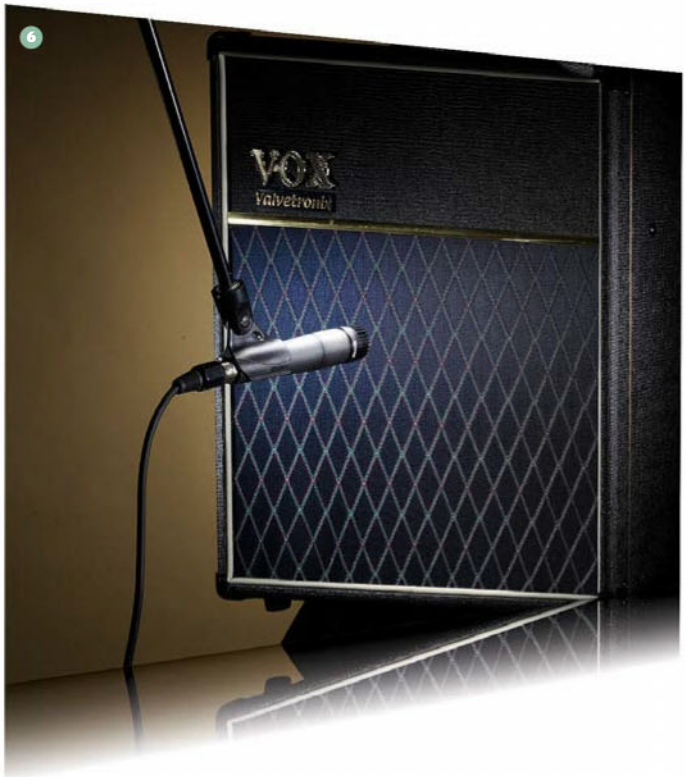
Additional mics can be used to capture different tones from the amp and ambient room sound

7 Multi-mic'ing

Additional mics can be used to capture different tones from the amp and/or some ambient room sound. When recording open-backed cabinets, great results can be obtained by using a second mic at the rear of the cab. When this technique is employed, it's wise to invert the phase on one of the channels. To create a sound that's larger than life, try recording a part with close and distant mics and pan the two channels, then repeat the process, panning the channels in the opposite direction. Two close mics pointing at different parts of the speaker – one dead-centre and the other towards the far edge – will pick up the full range of the speaker's tone.

8 Multi-amping

Another way of creating a huge sound is to split the signal from the guitar – most easily achieved via a stompbox with stereo outputs – and send it to two or more amps. All sorts of combinations of sound can be achieved, especially when panning techniques are employed. Of course, each amp can also be multi-mic'd if desired, and some truly three-dimensional results can be obtained. Different effects can be applied to the various amps, while using combinations of clean and dirty amp sounds can be really effective for delivering overdrive with definition, or grit and sparkle simultaneously.



9 DI boxes

Traditionally, the vast majority of professional engineers prefer to record electric guitars through a mic'd up amplifier, rather than use a DI (direct injection) box, even though specialist guitar DI units are readily available. That said, there are many pracitcal reasons to split the signal from the guitar and use a DI box in conjunction with an amp. If you find out later that the recorded amp sound doesn't work in the mix, or you wish you hadn't committed a particular effect 'to tape', the pure guitar sound can be re-amped and subsequently reprocessed without the need to discard a great take. You can route the DI'd signal through a modelling plug-in and blend that with the mic'd amp sound, too.

10 Amp positioning

Small amps can benefit from being placed on a stand, rather than the floor, as reflections from the floor can muddy the sound. A stool or something similar will do if a stand isn't available. For the same reason, when using larger stacks or combos with several speakers, try mic'ing one that's furthest from the floor. Placing an amp against a wall will increase the bottom-end response, and placing it in a corner will emphasise the low end further still. A mellow tone can be achieved by pointing the amp into the corner and mic'ing from behind.

11 Player positioning

In many studios, the guitarist can play in the control room while the amp is mic'd up in the live room. It feels less natural at first, but this way, you can more accurately monitor how your guitar sits in the mix through the studio monitors while you track. Some players prefer to be in the same room as their amp for reasons of feel and response, but if you are using a hollowbody or pickups that are succeptible to microphony, separating the guitar and amp can help. Of course, if feedback is desirable, you are better off in the room with the amp. >

12 String mic'ing

Setting up a mic to record the natural acoustic sound of the guitar strings can add percussive character when blended with the amp sound, especially if you are capturing old-school archtop sounds. For best results, the guitar needs to be isolated from the amp to prevent excessive bleed. This technique gives a good front-end attack to the sound and plenty of definition. A small condenser is the best mic for the job, and it's worth using a high-pass filter as well.

13 Noise

Before recording commences, make sure that all of your equipment is in good shape and not producing crackles, hums and buzzes. If you are having problems, they can often be dealt with by using noise-filtering units such as gates and expanders. These are best used before post-recording effects – compression and reverb, for example – are applied, as a compressor will emphasise noise, while a gate might chop off the natural tail of the reverb.

14 Strings and cables

Just as it's important that the guitar, amp and effects are performing to spec, make sure that all cables are functioning properly (it's uncanny how many times a lead that was working fine yesterday suddenly develops a fault just before a take). It's a good idea to ensure that spares are available. That goes for strings, too – valuable recording time can be lost just because a string has broken and no one has a spare. Some engineers will try to insist you use brand new strings when recording, but don't be bullied into it if you prefer the warmer sound of a played-in set; that applies especially to bass, as new bass strings can introduce undesirable harmonic content into the sound.

15 Pickup position

Many guitarists with instruments that have more than one pickup spend most of their time on the bridge unit. Using a variety of pickup positions when recording will thin or fatten the sound as required, but also help free up space when it comes to the mixing stage. Think of a recorded mix as a layer cake; too much density in one frequency range will cause a headache for the mixing engineer.

Before recording commences, make sure that all of your equipment is in good shape

16 Go active

Active pickups feature a preamp to boost the signal before it's sent to the guitar amp, and therefore require power – usually from a nine-volt battery. The benefits of using active pickups are that they have a much higher output than passive types, and better noise-rejection than humbuckers.

17 Guitar EQ

Although electric guitar sounds vary dramatically, they are all essentially midrange instruments with little or no extreme high- and low-end information. With the tone controls on the amp and the guitar itself, recorded electric guitar sounds often need little in the way of EQ if the desired tone was produced at the recording stage. However, if the sound needs a bit more bite, try boosting the upper mids somewhere between 2.5 and 5kHz. For added warmth, a little boost around the 250Hz range should thicken the sound, while muddiness is often dealt with by cutting a few dBs at around the 200Hz mark.

18 Filters

A very useful way of creating space for guitars in the final mix is to use tunable high-pass and low-pass filters to remove extreme frequencies that do nothing to enhance the guitar tone, but invade the space of other instruments that do perform in those areas. Generally speaking, it's worth losing everything below 80Hz, although it's not unusual to set the filter a good degree higher. Shaving off some high end may also be useful to help place the guitar in a specific area of the audio spectrum. Filter at the mixing stage, as the sound of the recording will often determine the optimum filtering points.

19 Multi-tracking guitars

Many recordings feature multiple guitar tracks playing simultaneously, but sometimes this can clutter up the mix. Another approach is to make each part sound distinctive by using different combinations of guitars, amps and effects. Panning the guitars to various areas of the stereo spectrum will create space for each part, while subtle use of ambient effects can create a sense of depth. EQ can be used to help guitars blend together. Try cutting certain frequencies from one guitar track and boosting those same frequencies in another.

20 Compression

Compressors are often applied to electric guitar tracks to bring out the guitar's natural sustain, as well as even out the overall dynamic range. Lead guitar parts usually benefit from a degree of compression treatment, while heavily overdriven rhythm parts often require very little or none at all, as the distortion naturally provides its own type of dynamic control. In the case of unnatural sounds, such as electric guitar, compression becomes a highly subjective topic, so experimentation is key to

achieving the desired effect. As a starting point, therefore, try medium-fast attack and release times – an extremely fast attack time will blunt the transient response of the note. Remember that electric guitars can be inherently noisy and compression will generally exaggerate any hums and buzzes.

21 Double tracking

To create a thicker rhythm guitar sound, overdub the same part one or more times. Depending on the desired effect, the overdub can be treated as one mono signal and mixed to the same stereo position, or panned left and right for a stereo double-tracked sound. Alternatively, treat the original track with an ADT (Artificial Double Tracking) effect. This can be done with a digital delay set to around 40 milliseconds. Again, the delayed signal can be panned or mixed as one with the original guitar track.

22 Stereo guitars

Aside from the stereo effect of doubling up the same part and panning it to opposite ends of the stereo spectrum, some guitarists use stereo rigs in conjunction with stereo effects. Traditionally, this involves using two amp cabinets, although single cabs that operate in stereo are available. To achieve a good, even stereo image, it's best to mic each cab identically, ideally with the same type of mic. Invert the polarity of one of the channels to avoid any out-of-phase issues, and pan them hard left and right.

Separation and spillage are always at the forefront of a recording engineer's mind

Stereo effects such as reverb, delay and room ambience, can be added to mono guitar signals at the mixing stage.

23 Electro-acoustic guitars

Acoustic guitars that have been fitted with a pickup can be recorded using the same techniques as standard electric guitars when plugged into an amp. Interesting sounds can be created by mic'ing up an acoustic guitar and sending the sound through an amp. This can be done live – although you should be aware of feedback – or a previously recorded acoustic track can be re-amped and used exclusively, or mixed with the original acoustic track. You can get some really gnarly and original 'electric' sounds with creative use of overdriven acoustic guitar; it's especially good for slide playing.

24 Effects

On entering a studio, some guitarists ask if they should leave off the effects they normally use and add them in later. Of course, this can be done; however, if the effects are integral to the desired sound and you are 'playing' the effect as much as you are the instrument – fuzzboxes, heavy spring reverb, long delays and so on – it might be difficult to create the right feel during the take without them. If there is uncertainty as to whether the effects are spot-on, split the signal to retain the option of reworking the sound during the mixing process.

25 Isolation and ISO boxes

Separation and spillage are always at the forefront of a recording engineer's mind, although some more old-school producers are happy to 'let it bleed'. Electric guitars, basses and drums are loud instruments that can bleed into each other's mics when played in the same room. Not everyone has the luxury of drum booths and separate rooms, but isolation boxes are great for isolating guitars during a rhythm track recording. They are also ideal for home recording, allowing a good volume level without disturbing neighbours. Isolation boxes are commercially available, but can be expensive; try making your own from wood and foam.

All about... fuzz

Fuzz wasn't the first type of effect, but it's probably shaped the sound and evolution of guitar music more than any other. **HUW PRICE** feels the buzz...

Have you ever wondered what makes fuzz different from distortion and overdrive? In its purest form, the fuzzbox is intended to create square wave clipping, and technicians use this term because it's what the waveform looks like on an oscilloscope. It occurs when the harmonic overtones are more or less equal in volume to the fundamental frequency.

There is no single method to square the wave. Some designs allow the circuit to run out of headroom (voltage) so the loudest parts – ie, the fundamental frequency – cannot be amplified beyond a certain point and the transient peaks are sliced off. This evens out the amplitude of the fundamental and the harmonic overtones.

Diodes can also be used to force signal clipping at a chosen voltage. Some pedals combine both methods, and designers have even used square wave generators, but the results are similar enough to fall under the fuzz umbrella regardless.

Things get more interesting when you start investigating dynamic response, picking definition, sustain and upper-octave effects, because all fuzzboxes have unique characteristics – often inspiring cultish levels of devotion. Some believe fuzz is at its best without the softening effect of valve overdrive; so plugging into a clean valve amp, or even going direct into a mixer or interface, allows you to hear the full effect. This brings us back around to the fathers of fuzz tone.

Cool to be square

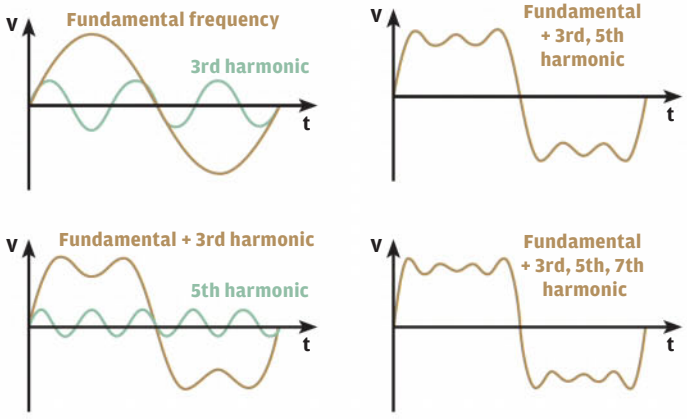
It's accepted that the Maestro FZ-1 was the first commercially available fuzzbox. Its origins can be traced to a Marty Robbins country track called *Don't Worry*, featuring guitarist Grady Martin on a Danelectro six-string bass plugged directly into a valve mixing desk.

During the session, one of the console transformers started to fail, making the Danelectro sound distorted and fuzzy. Everybody liked it so much they even recorded a solo with the fuzzed-out bass. The record was a huge hit, and when Nancy Sinatra booked into the studio shortly after, she requested the same sound. Unfortunately, the 'magic transformer' had failed completely in the interim, so studio engineer Glenn Snoddy teamed up with his friend Revis Hobbs to recreate the effect using transistors. They pitched the idea to Gibson and the first fuzz appeared as an effect built into a bass in February 1962.

A floor pedal version, known as the Maestro Fuzz-Tone FZ-1, followed soon after, but the product was a commercial failure, until Keith Richards came up with one of the definitive fuzz riffs on the legendary Stones hit *Satisfaction*, released in 1965.

The Beatles, Frank Zappa, The Ventures and a handful of garage-band guitarists had already experimented with fuzz, but after the initial 1962 production run of 5,000 units, Gibson shipped only three pedals in 1963 – and none in 1964.

After *Satisfaction*, everybody wanted to know how to get that tone, and soon Maestro sales were in the tens of thousands. Even so, interest in fuzz had been building on the London studio scene for a few years and many of the most iconic fuzz designs would subsequently be developed in the UK.



All fuzzboxes have unique characteristics – often inspiring cultish levels of devotion

Fuzz frenzy

A 1962 Ventures track called *The 2000 Pound Bee* featured a custom-made fuzz, and so impressed a young Jimmy Page that he asked an electronics engineer called Roger Mayer to make him a fuzzbox with more sustain and smoother decay. This was in 1964, and Mayer claims also to have made fuzzboxes for Jeff Beck and Big Jim Sullivan around that time.

Mayer's upgrade on the raspy and percussive Maestro set a new standard for fuzz tone, and in the fuzz frenzy that followed everybody wanted some of the action. Rather than get into circuit specifics, it's probably more illuminating to associate various players and their landmark recordings with the fuzzboxes they used.

Gary Hurst had already built some custom fuzzboxes, and teamed up with the Macari brothers to design the Sola Sound Tone Bender. The MkI featured on *Rubber Soul* by The Beatles, as well as *Heart Full Of Soul* by The Yardbirds, featuring Jeff Beck. But the sound is most commonly associated with Mick Ronson, who used an MkI throughout his Bowie years.

Some players prefer the MkII and MkIII versions, with most of the MkIIIs carrying the Vox label. The Tone Bender was a hugely influential design, and many of its competitors – including the Marshall Supa Fuzz and the JHS Zonk Machine – were virtual clones. Some things never change in the pedal world.

The Dallas Arbiter Fuzz Face has an equally important place in the fuzz pantheon. Based on a Schmitt trigger squaring circuit, the Fuzz Face was about as simple and cheap as a fuzzbox could be, but they were troublesome units. Good ones can sound sublime, as Eric Johnson and Stevie Ray Vaughan have demonstrated, but originals were wildly inconsistent.

Jimi Hendrix obviously thought so, because he asked Roger Mayer if he could sort out his Fuzz Faces. Mayer took a good-sounding example back to his workshop for analysis. His

idea was to blueprint the circuit in order to make it stable and reliable, and before long Mayer had become Hendrix's dedicated full-time tech. Many of the fuzzboxes Mayer later produced under his own name were based on the Fuzz Face circuits he'd modified for Hendrix.

In their elements

Some people prefer the earlier Fuzz Faces with germanium transistors for their warmer and fatter sound. The brighter, more cutting sound of the later version, with BC108 silicon transistors, can be heard on *The Dark Side Of The Moon* by Pink Floyd.

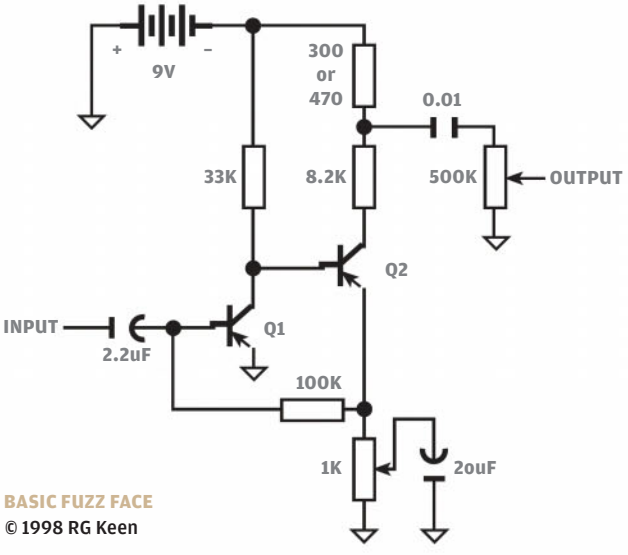
Meanwhile, in America, Mosrite's Fuzzrite was used on Iron Butterfly's *In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida*, and is generally thought to be the fuzz tone on Sergio Leone's spaghetti western soundtracks. Out in Japan, Shin-ei developed the Super Fuzz with its upper-octave effect. Pete Townsend used this huge and brutal-sounding fuzz pedal on The Who's *Live At Leeds* album.

Fuzzboxes evolved as the 60s wore on, moving from crude and raspy sounds to smoother, fatter and more velvety tones. Perhaps the ultimate example of the latter-day fuzzbox is the Electro-Harmonix Big Muff, so beloved of J Mascis, Billy Corgan, Jack White and even David Gilmour, who used a Big Muff during the late 70s.

In the days before cascading, high-gain valve preamps, fuzzboxes were the only way to get serious sustain. As the nature of fuzz developed, the music featuring it morphed from the garage-band pop of the mid-60s into psychedelic blues, proto metal, prog rock, jazz fusion, shoegaze and alternative rock. Fuzz has never really been out of style.

These days, most of the classic models have been reissued and specialist makers such as Analogman and D*A*M build fastidiously accurate replicas of the original circuits. DIY pedal builders have also found that fuzz pedals are usually quite simple to build, and commercially made kits are readily available.

For those players who can't choose between spluttery old-school sounds and creamy sustain, many of the modern boutique fuzzboxes have replaced preset components with controls on the exterior of the casing. Therefore, these days, there's no need to choose between one type of fuzz or another, because you can have every variety of the effect in the same enclosure.



BASIC FUZZ FACE
© 1998 RG Keen

The early PNP germanium transistor fuzzboxes were wired with a positive ground, which means you can't power them with a conventional power supply along with a bunch of negative ground pedals. You'll need a supply such as the Voodoo Lab Pedal Power 2 Plus, which has electronically isolated outputs. You may also like the voltage sag feature of this supply, because it simulates the effect of a worn battery and sweetens the fuzz tone. Fuzzboxes with NPN transistors can run alongside most modern pedals with no difficulties.

BUYER'S GUIDE

Whether you want old-school square waves or the stuttering, spluttering and oscillating aural assault of modern fuzzboxes, it's good to know there are plenty to choose from. Here are four of our favourites...

Z.VEX FUZZ FACTORY £129

Muse's Matt Bellamy has this five-knob fuzz built into his guitars. Although it features two NOS germanium transistors, the circuit is not modelled on any classic fuzz. Controls include vol, gate, comp, drive and stab.

FULLTONE 69 MKII £155

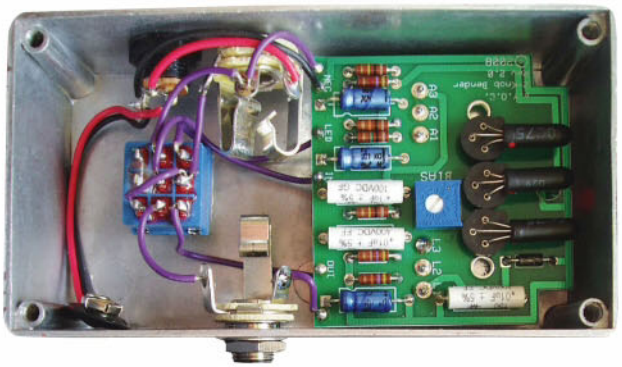
A popular Fuzz Face replica that adds a range of features to the stock germanium transistor circuit. These include a variable input level control and contour, which adds midrange gain. An internal trimmer sets the bias of the transistors to fine-tune the sound. The new Dunlop Fuzz Face Mini pedals are more affordable; visit www.jimdunlop.com to find out more.

DEATH BY AUDIO SUPERSONIC FUZZ GUN £230

A new-school pedal, the Supersonic Fuzz Gun was created to produce an immense range of extreme, yet also usable fuzz sounds, ranging from extremely harsh and 'dirty' tones to all-out white noise, feedback and self-oscillation, alongside warm traditional fuzz. Controls include bias, density, filter, level and a gate/oscillation switch.

BYOC ESV TWO-KNOB BENDER £66

There are plenty of Mk11 Tone Bender clones on the market, but this one stands out from the crowd because you can build it yourself. We actually put one of these together a few years back, and it sounded absolutely fantastic. The kit features selected NOS Philips OC76 germanium transistors and carbon comp resistors. There's even a bias trim pot to fine-tune your tone.



Clean Sweeping

Give your sweep-picking techniques a final polish as we wrap up our tutorial series with this trio of ascending and descending six-note patterns

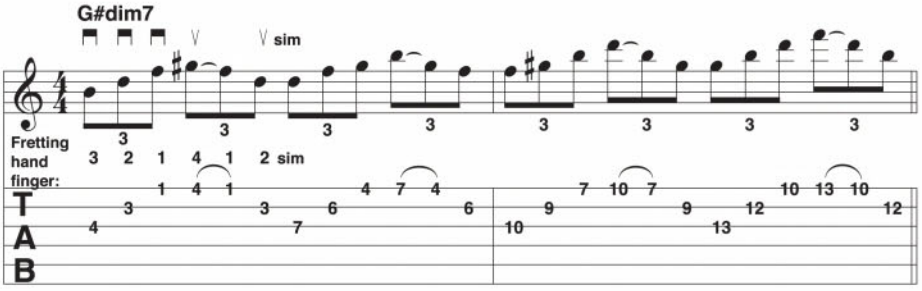
This month's tuition instalment is the final – yes, the final – look at sweep arpeggios. During this series, we've been looking at some exercises to improve sweep-picking techniques and playing some arpeggios that put those techniques into practice. All our previous sweep arpeggios have been spread over five strings; this month's, though, are spread over just three strings, and they all consist of an ascending and descending six-note pattern that works up the fretboard. At the risk of sounding repetitive, these should be practised slowly and accurately, making sure that only one note sounds at a time. As in previous months' sweep-picking exercises, start practising at around crotchet= 60 and ultimately aim for crotchet= 200.

The fretting-hand fingering is to be treated as 'suggested' fingering only; there are other ways to play these arpeggios, and different guitarists use different fingerings. For the plucking hand, each pattern starts with three downstrokes, followed by an upstroke, a pull-off and then another upstroke. 'Sim' is short for 'simile', and means carry on in the same way.

1 *G#dim7 arpeggio*

4:4 TIME

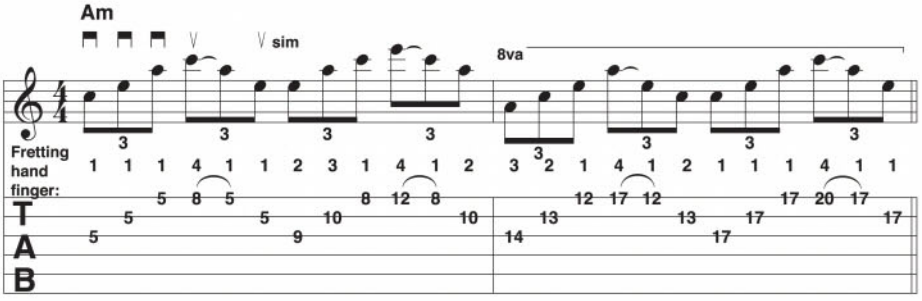
The formula for a diminished seventh arpeggio is root, flattened third, flattened fifth and double flattened seventh – which in the case of this G#dim7 arpeggio adds up to the notes G#, B, D, F. Unlike the following two arpeggios, the fretting-hand pattern and the fingering for the first six notes are simply moved up the fretboard for the rest of the exercise. The fretting-hand fingering for the first group of six notes necessitates a stretch for the fretting hand, but of course it'll get easier as you work your way up the fretboard.



2 *A minor arpeggio*

4:4 TIME

The first two beats of the first bar and the last two beats of the second bar involve 'rolling' the fretting-hand first finger. Keep a sharp eye on the fingering in the first bar on the third and fourth beats; the A note on the second string, 10th fret is fingered with the third finger on the way up but with the second finger on the way down, in order to make the change into the next bar easier by avoiding using the third finger for two notes in a row on different strings. Again, this is only suggested fingering, so feel free to alter it.

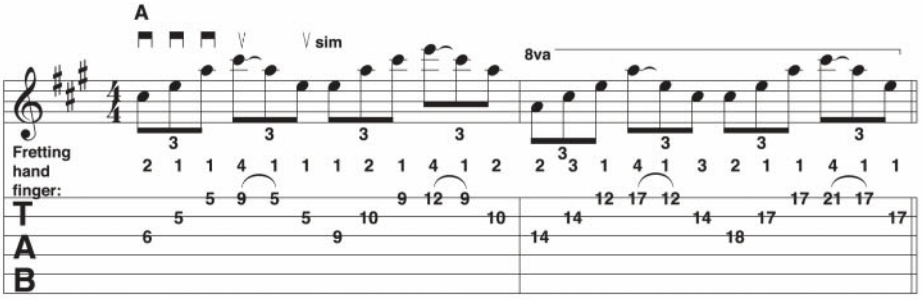


3 *A arpeggio*

4:4 TIME

Using the same finger for two successive notes on different strings is not generally considered a good idea, but the patterns in this example naturally lend themselves to a fingering that does exactly that. It's unconventional, we know, but do try the suggested fingering before you dive in and modify it. It's possible to work your way around the same-finger problem, but what you're left with may feel a little awkward and contrived.

After you've got your fingers floating casually over these arpeggios, try playing the G#dim7 exercise followed by the one in Am, then the G#dim7 exercise followed by the one in A. Fancy some more variations? Try starting with the highest group of notes, and then work down the fretboard instead of up; also try starting these arpeggios on the highest note of each six-note pattern, rather then the lowest note.



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Fretbuzz

Your letters. This month: gear streamlining, tape echoes, Big Joe Williams and political correctness...

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Driven to downsizing

Once again, as on many previous occasions, I find myself on a bit of a potential gear binge... in fact, I have already half-started. The reason for my issue, however, is very different from times past – I am no longer a proud driver. This means that the Orange TH30 half stack, and pedalboard that is somewhat larger than originally intended are, shall we say, less than practical.

I have, up until now, been quite a gear snob, needing for my equipment to be fully analogue; multi-effects and non-valve amplifiers were strictly off limits. But the overwhelming wish to be able to jump on the tube and make it to a gig with all of my tools is all too enticing.

After much deliberation, a second-hand TC Electronic Nova System is on its way, and while I have no idea how well it will go down with the rest of the band, it will be a damn sight easier to bring than the full board... results to follow.

The next question is whether the amp I have in mind is going to work. I have been doing my homework on YouTube (shout out to Chappers and The Captain at Andertons) and on your website, regarding the Matrix Elements VB800. I don't know if it will feel the same as a good valve amp when playing, but will an audience really be able to tell?

If it sounds good enough to gig, I feel the expense would be well worth it, just to see the look on every other player's face as I no longer have to break my back (or, indeed, a sweat) come the end of the set. Thanks for reading, would really love to hear your opinions!

Rob, *via email*

***G&B* The VB800 is not the most versatile choice, but it's one of the most convenient ways to get a quality JCM800-style drive sound without lugging a full stack around. There's no shortage of power either. Good luck, and let us know how you get on!**

Guitar & Bass LETTER OF THE MONTH

WRITTEN A LETTER OF THE MONTH?

Then you are the lucky winner of an Orange Crush PiX mini amp, featuring switchable overdrive, a built-in tuner and the Brit amp legend's timeless cosmetics. Visit **www.orangeamps.com** to find out more.

Up in smoke

In September 1994, the US Government released a 29 cent postage stamp depicting bluesman Robert Johnson. The ciggie he was smoking in the original photograph, taken in the 1930s, had been erased from the stamp.

In June this year, our local blues club, where our band recently headlined, published a poster for the gig. The ciggie I was smoking in the original photograph, taken in 2014, had been erased from the poster.

In the July issue of *Guitar & Bass*, you printed the 1959/60 Dallas Tuxedo ad on p96 in its unexpurgated entirety with Roy Plummer's ciggie still clamped firmly between his lips.

Three cheers for *G&B*, who publishes reality, doesn't mess about with history and does the job fearlessly in this PC world of ours!

Malcolm, via email

***G&B* Thanks Malcolm. While, given the enormous health risks, we're not pro-smoking, it does feel a little foolish to attempt to airbrush such habits out of history. Should we also pretend that The Beatles never took acid? Or that *Exile On Main St* was fuelled by early nights and a strict adherence to a raw food diet?**

Number nine...

Enjoying the latest edition of *Guitar & Bass*. Have you done or considered doing, a piece on the nine-string guitar of Big Joe Williams, and other such peculiarities?

Mike Daly, via email

***G&B* Thanks for your letter, Mike. As we mention in our review of the Strandberg 8-string on page 62 of this very issue, it's worth remembering that extended-range instruments aren't just for metal and there have been plenty of players over the years – Big Joe Williams included – who have utilised additional strings to great effect. Look out for a detailed exploration of this theme in the mag soon.**

Multi-ple choice

I read in your verdict on the Catalinbread Belle Epoch [July issue]: "Look elsewhere for multi-tap". Well, if it's multi-tap, multi-head echoes you're after, then you need look no further than another Catalinbread product: the excellent Echorec (I actually have two of them), based of course on the Italian Binson Echorec, which used a magnetic drum instead of a tape and had four playback heads.

A possible alternative, which I believe is also an excellent product, is the Boss RE-20 Space Echo, based of course on the Roland RE-201 Space Echo – a tape echo which had three playback heads. One little problem I've found with the Catalinbread Echorec – I don't know if it happens with other Catalinbread products – but with the Echorec I found that you get hum through the amplifier if you don't use the right DC power supply. There may be other units, but the only DC power supply that I have found that doesn't give any hum through the amplifier is the Boss PSA. One final word, regarding BB King: may he rest in peace. He will never be forgotten.

Paul Galvin, Lancs

***G&B* Thanks for the recommendations, Paul. The Echorec is indeed an excellent-sounding unit that appears on an awful lot of pedalboards. We wonder if the hum you've experienced is related to the way that the pedal interacts with other digital units on your board. Let us know if it still occurs when used independently with another PSU or if it just happens when the unit is part of a longer effects chain and then we may be able to help diagnose the problem. That said, it certainly wouldn't be the only pedal that's a little temperamental when it comes to power supplies.**

Hooray for Steve

I wanted to write in to thank Steve Clarke – and *G&B*, of course – for the amazing feature on Paul Kossoff's 1959 'Burst in the August issue. No other guitar mag seems to approach vintage or celeb-owned instruments in anywhere near the same depth, so please keep the good stuff coming!

Trevor Johnson, via email

***G&B* Thanks Trevor. You'll have to wait and see what else Steve has up his sleeve; you'll never guess Who it is.**

Echo-vexed

As an avid reader of your magazine for many years, I have enjoyed almost all of your product reviews. However, I really must object to Huw Price's summation of his article about the Catalinbread Belle Epoch.

I will quote the last paragraph: "Like the Topanga, the Belle Epoch weighs next to nothing, takes up hardly any space on a pedalboard and is completely noise-free. In all other respects, the experience is exactly like playing through a great tape echo."

As the owner of a Belle Epoch and several real tape delays, I feel that

I must point out that, although the Epoch is a very fine pedal in its own right, the claim that it accurately captures in every way the sound of an Echoplex EP-3 is in my opinion ludicrous, and makes me wonder about the objectivity of some of your reviewers.

Alan Haynes, via email

G&B **Hi Alan, we passed your letter on to Huw so that he could respond. Here's what he had to say: "It's always nice to hear from a fellow fan of tape echo units. I have owned several over the years, but my collection is now whittled down to three – a Roland RE-201 and two WEM Copicats, one of which is valve and the other solid state. Although I have never owned an Echoplex, I have been fortunate enough to use them from time to time in recording studios.**

"I'm very sorry if you found my review of the Catalinbread Belle Epoch misleading, or indeed ludicrous, however if you re-read it you will find I made no assertion that the Belle Epoch 'accurately captures in every way the sound of an Echoplex EP-3'. Those are your words, not mine.

"What I actually said, and you did quote me correctly, was that using the Belle Epoch 'is exactly like playing through a great tape echo'. I took care not to claim that the Belle Epoch is a flawless clone of the Echoplex EP-3, or indeed any other tape echo device. Instead, the comment was intended to convey my opinion that the Belle Epoch produces an unusually convincing generic tape echo effect, based on my experience of the real things. Perhaps the first paragraph of the section in which I assessed the Belle Epoch's sound and performance caused confusion because I mentioned Eric Johnson's well-publicised assessment of the similarities between the Belle Epoch and the Echoplex EP-3. It's my understanding that Mr Johnson has retired his EP-3 and the Belle Epoch has now taken up permanent residency on his pedalboard instead – as it has on mine.

"Anyway, I'm glad we can agree that the Belle Epoch 'is a very fine pedal in its own right', and I hope yours continues to give good service for many years to come. Huw Price."

HAVE YOUR SAY! Write to us by snail mail, *Guitar & Bass, Anthem Publishing, Suite 6 Piccadilly House, London Road, Bath BA1 6PL* or email **guitarandbass@anthem-publishing.com.** Alternatively get in touch via social media on Facebook or Twitter.

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Guitar & Bass

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

Postmodern Love!

The Fender Custom Shop's Postmodern Journeyman Relic Stratocaster and Tele on test

PETE TOWNSHEND'S LIVE RIG!

G&B goes backstage at Hyde Park for exclusive access to The Who's gear!

INTERVIEWS

Counting Crows • Gabrielle Aplin
Vintage Trouble

REVIEWS

PRS Paul's Guitar, Jackson Ampworks McFly, JHS pedals, Eventide, TC Electronic, J Rockett, Moog and lots more...

VOL 27 NO 1 ON SALE 04 SEPT

•Contents are subject to change

New music

We round up and rate a selection of this month's guitar-driven releases and reissues

Mercury Rev
THE LIGHT IN YOU

Mercury Rev return with their first release in seven years, chronicling a self-termed "turbulent" period in the lives of the American alt-rockers. *The Light In You* evokes the band's high-water mark – 1998's hugely acclaimed *Deserter's Songs* – and its 11 songs transport the listener to a familiar dream-like landscape where delicate lullabies flecked with otherworldly harp and flute playing burst into sweeping cinematic moments. Jonathan Donahue possesses one of the most distinctive and affecting voices in modern-day alternative music, and it's captured beautifully on *The Queen Of Swans*, a joyous, hymnal epic. *Rainy Day Record* features deliciously subtle slide and EBow textures, and while some moments here fall short of the heart-rending beauty of this enchanting band's career highlights, fans of the Buffalo, New Yorkers will find much to like on their eighth album. **GW**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Grandaddy, The Flaming Lips*

Rock Candy Funk Party
GROOVE IS KING

Joe Bonamassa's apparent refusal to sleep or have a holiday continues; this latest Rock Candy Funk Party release sees him again hooking up with regular touring drummer Tal Bergman, plus guitarist Ron DeJesus and bassist Mike Merritt. Fans of JB in blues-rock mode are likely to be disappointed, though; Joe takes Led Zeppelin to the disco on *East Village*, but the album mainly lives up to its title in the sense that the tracks here are much more groove than guitar-orientated, while the production – courtesy of Bergman – is considerably less organic-sounding than that of Bonamassa's solo work. *Groove Is King* has a more contemporary sound than the band's jazzier debut, largely because the late seventies and early eighties funk flavours showcased here have put down their Martinis, rolled up the sleeves on their blazers and strutted back into fashion. **CV**

6/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Brecker Brothers, Chic*

Vintage Trouble
1 HOPEFUL RD.

As musical CVs go, a debut album that yielded support slots with The Rolling Stones, The Who and AC/DC is not a bad start. Four years on from the release of the LA band's first record – *The Bomb Shelter Sessions* – this follow-up combines blues, soul, country and 60s R&B flavours, with the once-in-a-generation voice of Ty Taylor summoning the spirits of James Brown and Otis Redding. Swedish-born guitarist Nalle Colt unleashes some furious slide playing on opener *Run Like The River*, while on *From My Arms* his tasteful soloing is sublime. The soulful shuffle of *Doin' What You Were Doin'* and the pleading ballad *Another Man's Words* demonstrate a depth of songcraft that belies the band's brief existence. Perhaps some will find such a faithful stylistic retelling of genres rooted in the past a little cynical, but when the musicianship is this good, such concerns seem churlish. **GW**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Otis Redding, Alabama Shakes*

Gabrielle Aplin
LIGHT UP THE DARK

Gabrielle Aplin topped the UK singles charts aged 19, selling 1.5 million singles and stacking up an amazing 63.5 million Spotify plays. Written with The Temperance Movement's Luke Potashnick, *Light Up The Dark* has more of a collaborative spirit than the average singer-songwriter record. Considered guitars and vintage synths provide interesting textures, but it's Aplin's wonderful voice that stars. **CV**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Feist, Joni Mitchell*

The Robert Cray Band
4 NIGHTS OF 40 YEARS LIVE

Released across a variety of formats, including a two-CD set and a DVD, Robert Cray fans are treated to a career-spanning set from four recent LA shows, plus archive material from the 1982 San Francisco Blues Festival and a 1987 TV appearance in the Netherlands. Cray's soulful brand of blues is a little too smooth for some, but his touch and tone remain instantly recognisable, and he's still a fine vocalist indeed. **CV**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Stevie Ray Vaughan, Albert Collins*

Motörhead
BAD MAGIC

Who would have expected such a left turn on Motörhead's 22nd studio album? We might have predicted a move towards acoustic blues, but these minimal European house beats are a curveball… we're joking, of course; *Bad Magic* oozes with the thunderous rock 'n' roll attitude that has powered them for 40 years. That said, this is Lemmy and co's most energised and entertaining work for some time. **CV**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Motörhead*

ALBUM OF THE MONTH

Foals

WHAT WENT DOWN

Foals' fourth album could be the record that elevates the Oxford band to indie rock's top table. Galloping out of the traps with the malicious, dark-hued Nick Cave-like title track – an assault of crushing fuzz guitar and primal vocals – *What Went Down* is Foals' most progressive and inventive release. It's at times their heaviest, yet most cerebral and reflective work – a significant departure from the infectious bounce of 2013's *Holy Fire*. The anthemic *Mountain At My Gates* has a devilishly catchy riff and breaks into a euphoric chorus; it's as bombastic as anything in their catalogue, but this is a body of work composed with an adroit balance of light and shade. There are no concessions to lowest-common-denominator lad rock, and *Birch Tree*, *Give It All* and *London Thunder* deliver blissful, synth-swathed changes of pace. At times, *What Went Down*, recorded with Arctic Monkeys producer James Ford in the same Provence village where a tortured Vincent van Gogh cut off his own ear, flirts with soporific West Coast soul – as Yannis Philippakis and his band demonstrate a dextrous ability to combine mass appeal with wistful elegance. This is Foals' finest work to date and a shot in the arm for British guitar music. **GW**

9/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Bombay Bicycle Club, Tame Impala*

Jared James Nichols

OLD GLORY AND THE WILD REVIVAL

Wisconsin's Jared James Nichols has quickly built a reputation as a fearsome blues-rock player. The 25-year-old has toured with ZZ Top and Lynyrd Skynyrd, and those all-American influences are evident on this raunchy debut. Nichols' playing is wonderfully wanton with a crunching blues tone and outlandish soloing, while *Let You Go* and *Sometimes* feature storming classic rock choruses. **GW**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Lynyrd Skynyrd, AC/DC*

Albert Hammond Jr

MOMENTARY MASTERS

Albert Hammond Jr's 2006 solo album *Yours To Keep* is still the best record any member of The Strokes has had anything to do with since their sublime debut LP re-drew the indie landscape in 2001. *Momentary Masters* is more than hooky enough to prove both that Hammond has still got it and that his songwriting prowess is criminally underused in the context of his 'day job'. **CV**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *The Strokes, The Cribs*

DVD spotlight

Heaven Adores You

A DOCUMENTARY FILM ABOUT THE LIFE & MUSIC OF ELLIOTT SMITH

Elliott Smith was the finest American songwriter of the post-grunge era. Though his tragic passing in 2003 robbed the world of a breathtaking talent, Smith was extraordinarily prolific and left a substantial body of work behind for fans to treasure. From the whispered intimacy of early four- and eight-track recordings, on which he played every instrument, to the lush studio arrangements and sonic ambition of his later albums, Smith's catalogue bulges at the seams.

Raised in Texas, Smith spent much of his life in Portland, Oregon where, while working low-paid temporary demolition jobs and playing in cult alt-rock band Heatmiser in the early 1990s, he began to develop his own sound. A blend of rich Lennon and McCartney-influenced harmonies, the raw emotion and sensitivity of Cobain and a Paul Simon-like knack for making the incredibly clever sound effortless, Smith's best songs – *Between The Bars*, *Say Yes*, *Angeles*, *Waltz #2*, *King's Crossing* – all stand up to comparison with those rock A-listers. The years since his passing have seen a variety of posthumous releases that reveal that much of the music he discarded or left unfinished was of the highest quality, too. Compared to the glut of anodyne acoustic singer-songwriters who have emerged in recent years, Smith was the real thing, and his catalogue will stand like a beacon for aspiring musicians for decades to come.

Heaven Adores You combines footage of the three major cities of significance in Smith's life – Portland, New York and Los Angeles – with interviews with some of those who knew him best on his journey from solo acoustic gigs to a handful of people in bars through to his performance at the Academy Awards ceremony in 1998 and beyond. The artist's own voice is heard via archive interview and performance footage, plus snippets of early childhood recordings and teenage demos, some of which would later evolve into songs that will be more than familiar to fans.

The uninitiated should still head straight to Smith's key studio albums – *Either/Or*, *XO* and *Figure 8* – but for those already acquainted with his music who are interested in finding out more about Elliott Smith the man as much as the artist, *Heaven Adores You* is essential, if not always easy or objective, viewing. **CV**

8/10

EXTRAS *60 minutes of extended interviews*

Eleanor Jane

SCOTT GORHAM

"My Spinal Tap moment..."

The Les Paul-toting Thin Lizzy and Black Star Riders legend talks Eric Clapton, Phil Lynott and fighting...

1 I couldn't live without my...
"I finally found a guitar that I'm absolutely in love with, and that's the Gibson Les Paul Axcess. They chambered it for me, to make it much lighter. After you've been playing out there for a number of years, shit starts to go south – your back, your shoulder, your neck. It's feather-light, but it hasn't lost any of the tone and the balance is perfect."

2 In another life, I would be...
"My father had a construction business. I used to work with him, but I hated every fucking moment of it. He wanted me to take over the company. We had kind of a pact. He said, 'You go to England, you've got your six-month visa; if you are a total fucking failure, you come back and work with me'. Thankfully, I got the job with the Lizzy guys..."

3 The band that started it all...
"Probably the biggest influence was Eric Clapton. I saw Cream four times. The first two were absolutely brilliant. By the fourth time, there were 15-minute bass solos, 30-minute drum solos, and I went, 'I'm outta here'."

4 The one that got away...
"I came to England with two guitars, one was a vintage Strat. The other was just a real piece of shit Les Paul copy. I hadn't anticipated just how expensive England was. I needed the money, so I sold it to Roger Hodgson in Supertramp – my brother-in-law, Bob Siebenberg, was playing with them at the time. Roger bought it and went off to sell 40 million albums with the fucking thing!"

5 My Spinal Tap moment...
"Thin Lizzy kind of *was* Spinal Tap. We used to get into a lot of fights with other people. Phil was the kind of guy that people just went for to make their reputation. All he had to do was glance at a guy's chick and that was it. Before I was in Thin Lizzy, I'd probably been in one fight; after 10 years with Lizzy I think I'd been in 20! Thanks Phil! But that boy could fight..."

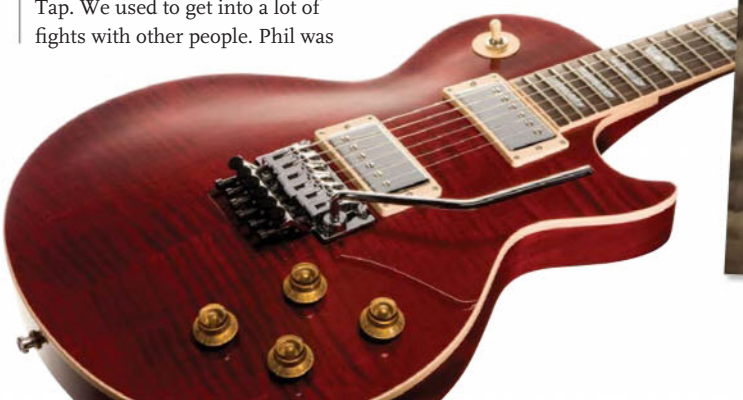
6 The best advice I've ever been given...
"Practise as much as you can. If you can't put in the time, you're not going to amount to anything."

7 The first thing I play when I pick up a guitar...
"I won't go out of that bubble because I know that's ultimately where we'll end up. I try to keep my head in the game by warming up with Black Star Riders and Lizzy songs."

8 The most important thing on my rider...
"Oh, the white wine, man! I can't do the hard stuff anymore..."

9 My guiltiest musical pleasure...
"I think everyone has pretty much got me nailed! The keyboard thing doesn't shake me too much, the new pop things don't get me going either. I'll ultimately go for a good, guitar-based kind of band."

10 If I could learn to play one thing...
"For the longest time, I thought that schooled musicians were a bunch of pussies. I really did. But I got hooked up with a couple of guys who were Florida music graduates. When I saw how well their musical speak got them through any kind of musical problem... If I could do it all over again, then I would probably go to music school."



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THE AUTHENTIC **REVELATION RJT-60**

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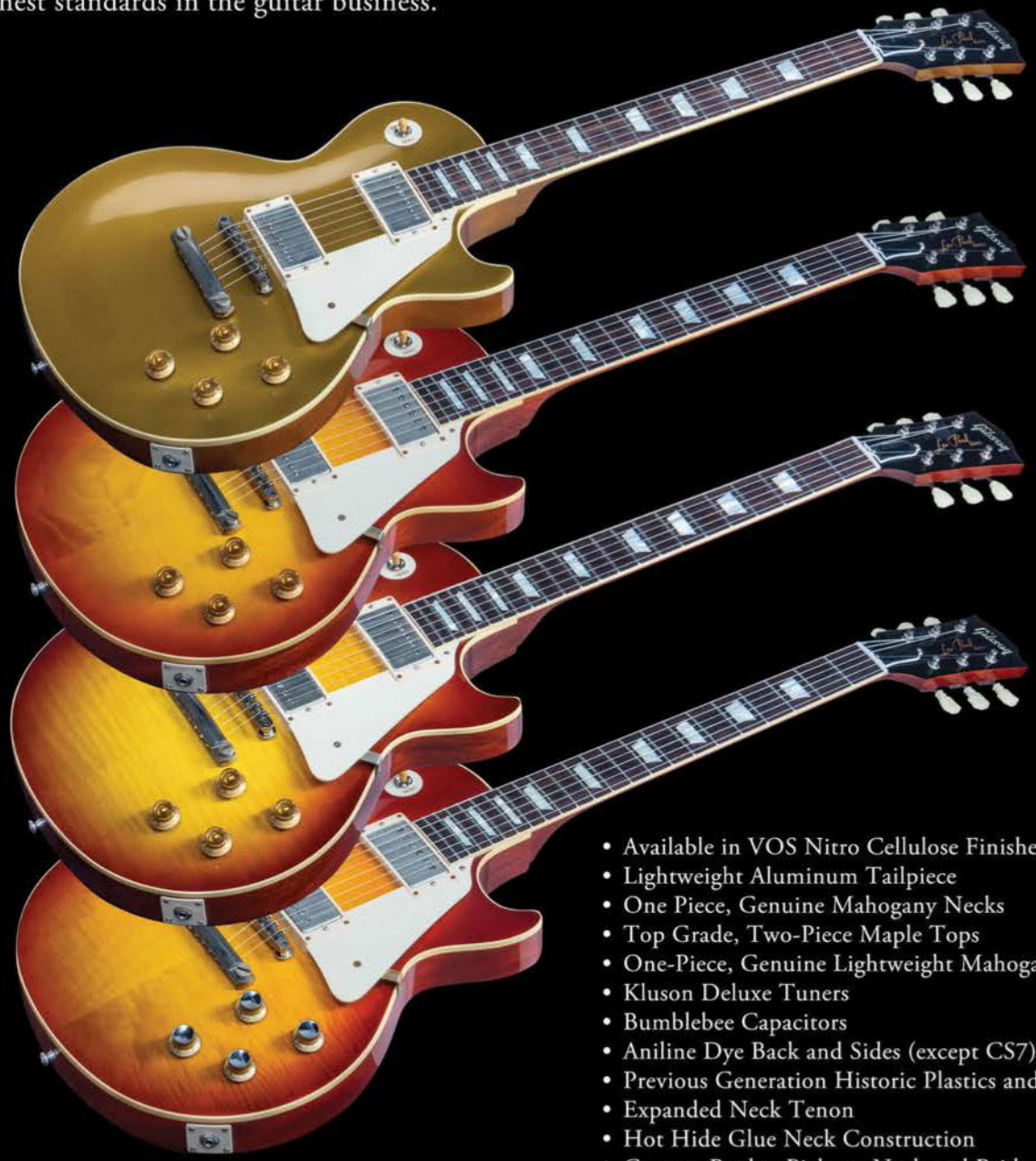
CS Series

The Ultimate 1950's Style Hand Crafted Player's Les Paul

The new CS Series from Gibson Custom is where hand-crafted excellence meets ultimate Les Paul performance. For players in pursuit of authentic vintage Gibson tone, feel and craft, Gibson Custom's CS Les Paul range is the perfect destination. Offering a performance focused Les Paul of Historic lineage in a variety of 50's inspired, beautifully crafted guitars, each CS model delivers the authentic looks, the feel and most importantly, the tone of the legendary Les Paul guitar, hand-crafted to the highest standards in the guitar business.

- Available in VOS Nitro Cellulose Finishes
- Lightweight Aluminum Tailpiece
- One Piece, Genuine Mahogany Necks
- Top Grade, Two-Piece Maple Tops
- One-Piece, Genuine Lightweight Mahogany Backs
- Kluson Deluxe Tuners
- Bumblebee Capacitors
- Aniline Dye Back and Sides (except CS7)
- Previous Generation Historic Plastics and Knobs
- Expanded Neck Tenon
- Hot Hide Glue Neck Construction
- Custom Bucker Pickups-Neck and Bridge
- Historic Truss Rod Assembly (no tubing)
- 2015 Gibson Custom Die Cast Rhythm/Treble Switch Cavity Cover